

FINAL REPORT: THE VIRTUAL HEAD TEACHER PILOT PROJECT
APRIL 2012 - 14

CONTEXT:

Due to the large numbers of declared Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people in Kent schools the authority has been involved in a number of Government projects, most recently the Gypsy, Roma Traveller Achievement Programme (GRTAP) 2006-9. As an authority we are always interested in researching different approaches to raise the inclusion and attainment of all our pupils, particularly the most disadvantaged, hence our involvement this national pilot project.

Kent covers a diverse area with people from differing economic, social and ethnic backgrounds, ranging from the disadvantaged to the very wealthy residing in small rural villages and large urban towns. Kent currently has in excess of 590 schools, 275 of which have declared Gypsy/Roma pupils and 43 declared Travellers of Irish Heritage.

Kent is one of the main entry points to the UK. As a result, there is a higher than average transient school population compared with other UK local authorities. The largest emerging community is from Eastern Europe which includes many Roma families. In addition, Kent has long been a destination for English Gypsies and Irish Traveller families, seeking seasonal work during the summer and autumn months, the majority of whom are now settled in houses across the authority, with some families living in LA, district or privately run sites. Taken together, this has led to a higher than national average number of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils in Kent schools

This is evidenced below by the national data of declared Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils which illustrates that a large percentage of Travellers in the UK live in Kent. The comparison with the all pupils' figures illustrates that Travellers are over-represented in Kent by a factor of almost 3.

2012 data	Kent	National	Percentage of UK Traveller children residing in Kent
*Travellers of Irish Heritage	81	5,229	1.54%
*Gypsy/Roma	1,713	16,521	10.36%
*Combined GRT	1,796	21,750	8.25%
All pupils	214,151	7,531,799	2.84%

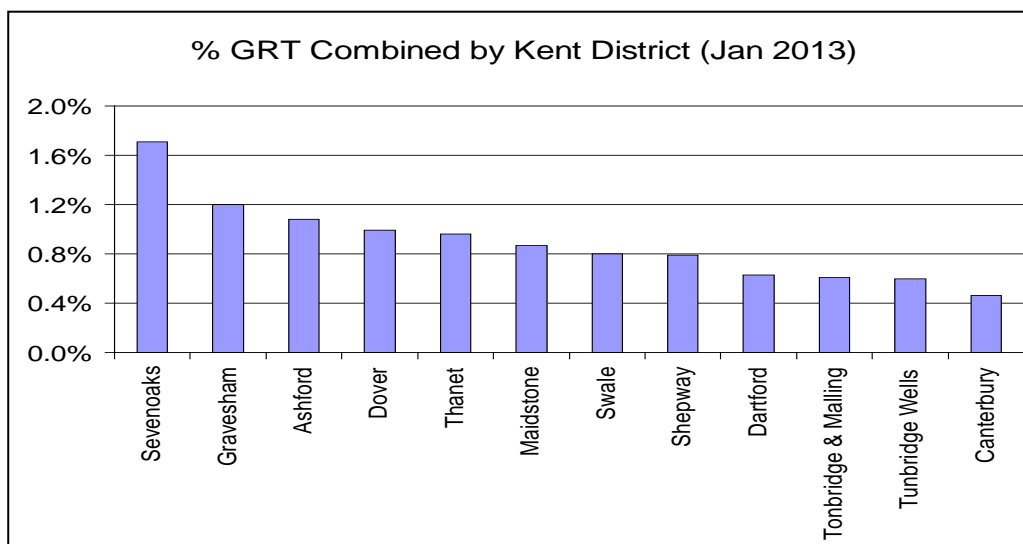
** Not including a high percentage of undeclared Travellers registered as White British or White Eastern European*
Source: School Census 2012

As evidenced below the number of Gypsy, Roma and Travellers in Kent has been increasing steadily over the last 5 years (47%).

Year	Total Jan. roll	Gypsy and Roma.	% Gypsy and Roma	Traveller of Irish Heritage	% Traveller of Irish Heritage	Gypsy, Roma and Traveller	% Gypsy, Roma and Traveller
2010	213015	1286	0.60%	88	0.04%	1374	0.65%
2011	213432	1536	0.72%	92	0.04%	1628	0.76%
2012	214651	1715	0.80%	81	0.04%	1796	0.84%
2013	216172	1771	0.82%	80	0.04%	1851	0.86%
2014	219656	1937	0.91%	86	0.39%	2023	0.92%

Source: School Census 2010 - 12

There have been significant percentage increases in Tunbridge and Malling (202%), Ashford (104%) and Thanet (80%). The largest percentage of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils in a district's school population remains Sevenoaks at 1.64%.



These figures are likely to increase due to:

- 1) Increased rights of migration for Bulgarian and Romanian citizens.
- 2) The publication of the 'Progress report by the ministerial working group on tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers' and the revised planning policy for Traveller sites, which have returned decisions on Traveller site provision to local authorities who are best placed to know the needs of their communities. KCC has already commenced the roll out of extra site provision, with a Maidstone site now extended from 8 to 26 pitches, permission being given to develop a Sittingbourne site from 8 pitches to 16 static (plus 8 non-static) and consultations in process to develop further sites across Kent.

Declared Gypsy, Roma and Travellers are the 7th largest ethnic group in Kent schools.

Total Roll January 2014	English	White Eastern European	African	Indian	Other White	British	Gypsy, Roma Traveller
219656	177928 (81%)	3994 1.8%	3511 1.6%	3321 1.5%	2516 1.1%	2473 1.1%	2023 0.9%

Source: School Census 2014

In Kent an increasing number of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families are accessing Children's Centres and Early Years provision and attendance at Primary is improving. However a disproportionate number of Traveller parents are choosing Elective Home Education (EHE) across all key stages, but particularly in KS3 with few pupils entering higher education.

ACHIEVEMENT DATA (Source: KCC Management Information)

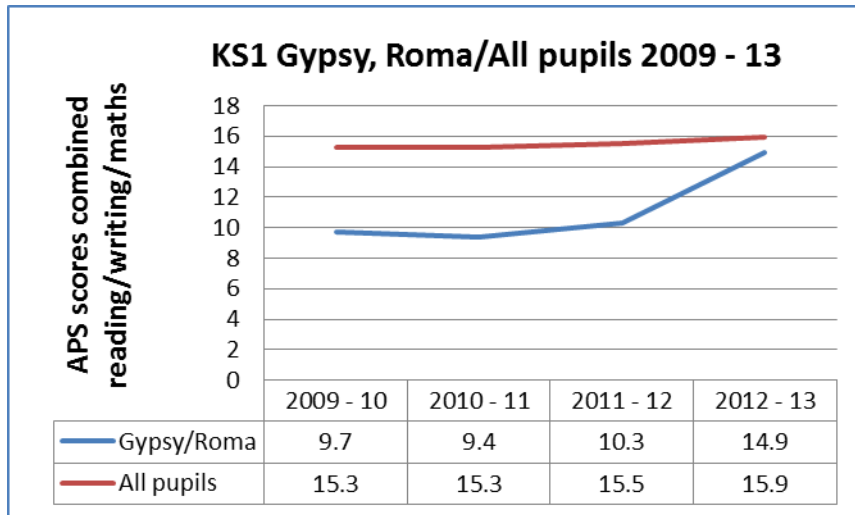
Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people are the lowest achieving minority ethnic group both locally and nationally. Although the gap is being closed between Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and others in all key stages, there is still a great deal of work to do as evidenced below.

***As the number of Irish Traveller pupils partaking in KS1 tests between 2009 and 13 is under ten, it would not be considered robust evidence, so this group will not be included in this analysis.**

School Outcomes for GRT Children and Young People over a four year period (including the first 12months of the project)

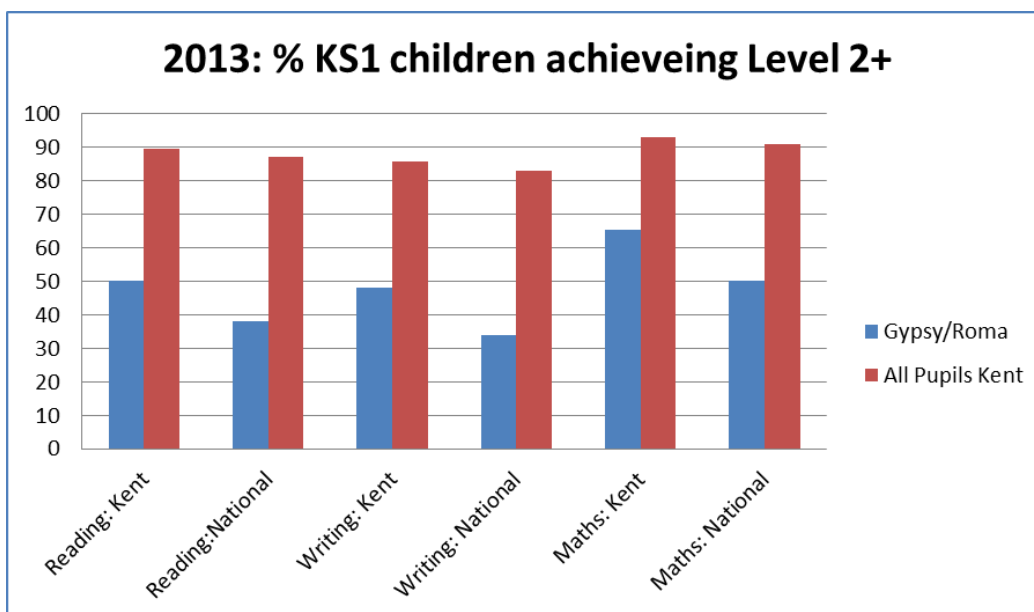
KS1 data	Total Pupils	Avg Reading APS	Avg Writing APS	Avg Maths APS	Read Write Maths APS
2009 - 10					
Kent: Gypsy/Roma	104	9.7	8.6	10.9	9.7
Kent All KS1	15046	15.8	14.3	15.7	15.3
2010-11					
Kent: Gypsy/Roma	120	9.2	8.3	10.6	9.4
Kent All KS1	15471	15.8	14.3	15.7	15.3
2011-12					
Kent: Gypsy/Roma	141	10.4	9.4	11.2	10.3
Kent All KS1	15764	16.0	14.5	15.9	15.5
2012-13					
Kent: Gypsy/Roma	181	15.3	13.9	15.3	14.9
Kent All KS1	16157	16.5	15.0	16.3	15.9

Progress data indicates that Gypsy/Roma pupils have been making steady progress over the last 4 years, with a slight dip in reading and writing in 2010 – 11.



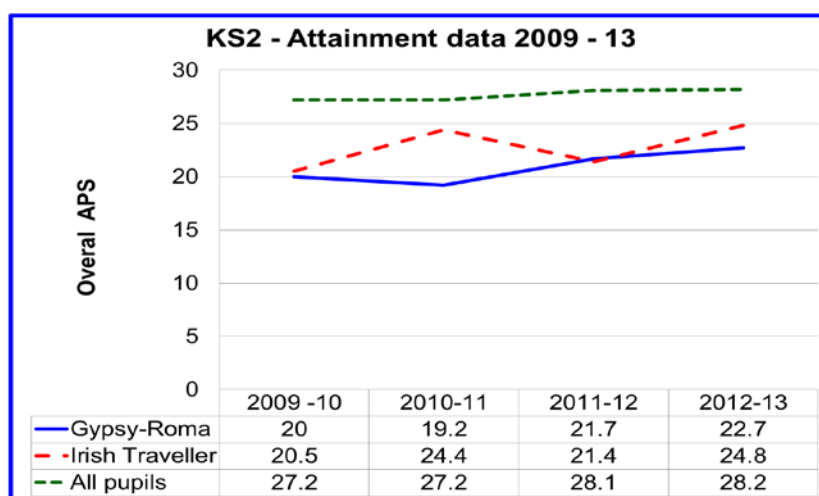
In KS1 tests Gypsy/Roma pupils in Kent are achieving better in Maths than in reading and writing and although they are underachieving compared with other pupils in Kent in all areas, they are out performing Gypsy/Roma pupils nationally.

2013 LA/National Comparative data of KS1 Achievement % Level 2+							
Group	Kent Cohort	Reading		Writing		Maths	
		Kent	National	Kent	National	Kent	National
Gypsy, Roma	181	50.3	38	48.1	34	65.2	50
All Pupils	16157	89.6	87	85.6	83	93.0	91

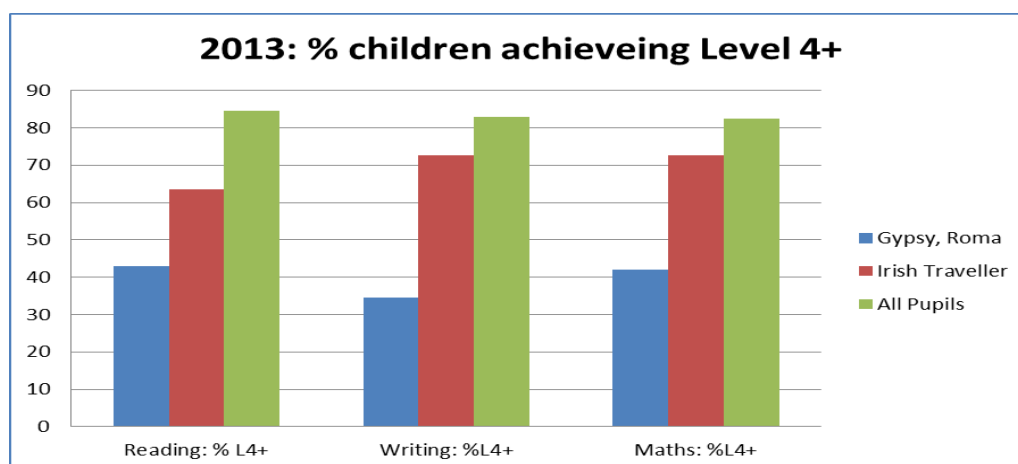


KS2 progress data indicates a gradual improvement in achievement for all Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, with a dip for Gypsy/Roma children in 2010-11, and for Irish Travellers in 2011-12.

KS2 Data	Number of Pupils	English APS	Maths APS	Overall APS
2009-10				
Kent - Gypsy/Roma	103	19.5	20.6	20.0
Kent – Irish Traveller	12	20.6	20.8	20.5
All Kent KS2	14878	27.0	27.4	27.2
2010-11				
Kent- Gypsy/Roma	134	18.8	20.9	19.2
Kent – Irish Traveller	9	24.6	24.3	24.4
All Kent KS2	15342	26.8	27.7	27.2
2011-12				
Kent - Gypsy/Roma	133	21.6	21.8	21.7
Kent – Irish Traveller	8	20.1	22.5	21.4
All Kent KS2	15073	27.9	28.3	28.1
2012-13				
Kent- Gypsy/Roma	133	23.1	22.8	22.7
Kent – Irish Traveller	11	23.4	25.2	24.8
All Kent KS2	15082	28.3	28.6	28.2



In 2012 – 13 Gypsy/Roma children in KS2 have been underachieving compared with Irish Travellers and other pupils in all areas.



Attainment data for Gypsy/Roma and Irish Travellers in Kent in 2013 are better than the national data for those groups with the exception of spelling, punctuation and grammar for Gypsy/Roma children. This is particularly the case for the Irish Traveller pupils.

LA/National Comparative data of KS2 Achievement % Level 4+									
Group	No. of pupils	Reading		Writing		Spelling, punctuation, grammar		Maths	
		Kent	National	Kent	National	Kent	National	Kent	National
Gypsy, Roma	133	42.9	38	34.6	32	18.8	21	42.1	40
Irish Traveller	11	63.6	52	72.7	44	36.4	32	72.7	54
All Pupils	15082	84.5	86	82.9	83	70.4	74	82.5	85

PILOT RATIONALE

Due to the large number of schools with underachieving Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and the relatively small, though highly experienced and knowledgeable team that cover this work, it was necessary to take a strategic approach involving the following actions and outcomes:

ACTIONS

ESTABLISHING THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL FOR GYPSY< ROMA AND TRAVELLER PUPILS

During the pilot it was decided that the Virtual Head Teacher would have managerial responsibility for 3 full time equivalent GRT Advisory Teachers and 6 full time GRT Outreach Officers, including the appointment of a young man from the Traveller community. The team all had expertise and experience of working with and raising the achievement of GRT pupils in Kent schools. This team was distributed equally across the 3 areas of Kent: East, Mid and West.

SCHOOL TO SCHOOL COLLABORATION

In line with KCCs Key strategic documents Bold Steps for Kent and more recently Facing the Challenge: Delivering Better Outcomes' the pilot project has concentrated on developing school to school collaboration to achieve a faster rate of improvement in the quality of provision within schools for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, resulting in improved outcomes for pupils, including reducing achievement gaps.

In order to do this we have:

- 1) Established pilots across Kent including Children Centre's, Primary and Secondary Schools.

The aim is for these establishments to become Champion Schools for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller attainment, well-being and inclusion, able to build strong collaborations, disseminating good practice to schools and settings with similar issues.

Evidence of success includes:

- Identifying gaps in provision for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils by collating base line information and implementing a Gypsy, Roma and Traveller audit, which is now being rolled out to other schools across the county.
- Identifying barriers for learning and developing effective strategies to overcome these.

- Narrowing the gap and accelerating progress for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. As evidenced in case studies.
- Raising the number of ethnic declarations
- Improved attendance, due to many factors including
 - Recognition of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture within the curriculum
 - Increased understanding of how to promote better behaviour and safety for this vulnerable group resulting in less exclusion and managed moves.
 - Increased Gypsy, Roma and Traveller family and community engagement and involvement.
 - Fostering good relations by raising awareness and understanding of and respect for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture, beliefs and traditions of all staff, pupils and the wider community.
 - Raised self-esteem of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils.

“The support from the GRT team has been excellent and the close collaborative working has enabled nearly all initiatives to secure positive outcomes for the children.”

Current tracking shows that our GRT children are making accelerated progress for the first time and it is clear that they are now feeling far more valued within the school community. This is demonstrated by the fact that many are now openly talking about their culture which they did less of before”. Pilot Primary School Head teacher

“Staff have been on board throughout and have enjoyed incorporating GRT culture and themes into their lessons. This has made a significant difference... Secondary Pilot School Assistant Head

- 2) Established School Improvement Groups (SIGs) for Head teachers and SMT in double districts. These focus on providing updates on national initiatives to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller attainment and strategic advice to accelerate the learning of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people based on individual school and district need. This is then cascaded to all school staff.

“The ideas to ensure inclusivity and how to meet Equality duty objectives were very useful”.

“Reminded me that some of the language that our children use may not be poor ‘English’ but Romani”

“I will now report to the Governing body and arrange a discussion with the SENco [Inclusion Manager] to try and improve attainment results”.

- 3) Established District hubs/networking events to enable groups of staff to meet, share good practice and develop strategies to accelerate learning. This work links with broader narrowing the gap initiatives. Most common issues discussed have been attendance, unauthorised absence, cultural influences on learning and inclusion.

“I have a greater understanding on how history and culture impacts on engagement in settings and schools”.

“There were plenty of strategies to help raise the attainment by using GRT texts and EAL teaching and learning strategies”.

- 4) Established GRT “surgeries”, hosted by local secondary schools in all districts, have enabled staff from schools and settings to discuss individual pupils and specific curriculum issues. The main issues raised were attendance, inclusion, behaviour, parental involvement, cultural awareness and pupil attainment.

“Hadn’t realised the vast number of barriers, I understand more about Gypsy, Roma and Travellers now”.

“It’s given me greater knowledge on how to approach Travellers living on a site to encourage attendance at our setting”.

Over the period of the pilot project GRT performance has improved and Participating schools have sustained development of professional knowledge and skills.

ENSURING SOUND MULTI AGENCY WORKING

There is an ongoing need to support new and mid-term arrivals to access school places. It was also apparent that an increasing number of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people were becoming EHE and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller attendance was, and is, an ongoing issue. To overcome these barriers the team have:

- Worked with members of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community to support their work in raising awareness of their culture and history both in schools and in the South East Romany Museum.
- Continued to provide training, advice and support for other professionals alongside consultation on 'what works' with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community. Regular and on-going partnership work with the Police, Advocacy and Inclusion teams: EHE, CME (children missing education), Attendance, STS (specialist teachers service) and partnership with parents.
- Been part of a pilot project to streamline services supporting pupils with low attendance, those missing education or considering elective home education.
- Ensured that Schools and parents are aware of new DfE Admissions and Attendance Policies.
- Supported schools and parents to ensure that dual registration and distance learning, during periods of mobility to engage in work, works effectively.
- Improved partnership work with Kent Community Health NHS Trust Practitioner and Public Health Specialists to raise awareness of health issues facing the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community. This has resulted in more informed support for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people around health issues: including teenage pregnancy, immunisation and mental health leading to better outcomes.
- Developing working practices with established and new Kent Integrated Adolescent Support Service managers and Troubled Families Local Project Delivery Managers to ensure that the needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people are met and delivered by a professional who has knowledge and experience of working with the GRT community.
- Developed partnership work with Police, Gypsy Traveller Unit (housing) and Health to share working practices and provide networking opportunities. This resulted in a conference attended by 200 delegates, which raised awareness of a broad range of professionals, enabling them to develop their knowledge of interventions that will promote better outcomes for the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community.

The Virtual Head Teacher has had regular meetings with the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration to discuss possible impact on education following the end of the Transition period for Bulgaria and Romania. As a result of the growing number of migrants from many communities arriving in Kent the Outreach Officers have increased support work in the Gateways, with the Salvation Army and other organisations used by new migrants to generate referrals. Advice has been offered to schools and partnership agencies on successful strategies and interventions to support new arrivals and meet the educational needs of the new emerging communities.

The team has delivered training for NQTs, 250+ teaching students, post-graduate teachers and tutors from Canterbury Christ Church University. Tutors had noted a lack of knowledge around Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture and strategies to increase inclusion and access to education. This has been most successful and will be rolled out to other universities.

REDUCING EXCLUSIONS

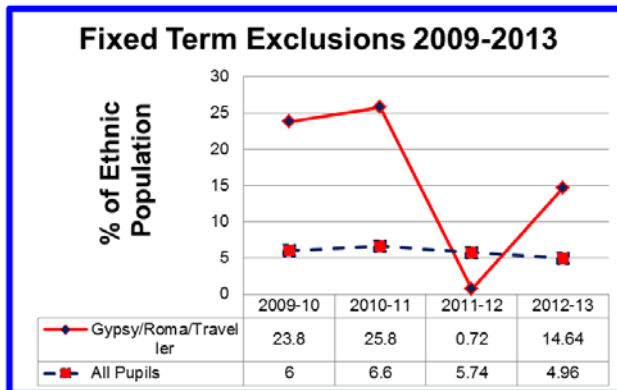
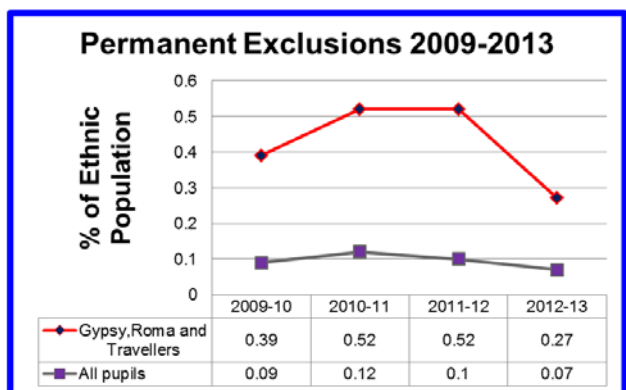
Gypsy, Roma and Travellers are disproportionately more likely to be excluded both permanently and on fixed terms than other pupils in schools both locally and nationally. To reduce the number of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller fixed term or permanent exclusions the Virtual School have:

- Made schools aware of cultural factors that may affect behaviour.
- Worked in partnership with Educational Psychologists and the Specialist Teachers Service to provide appropriate guidance and provision.
- Offered schools that have pupils at risk of exclusion 1-1/group support/mentoring to sustain education.
- Offered advice to Pupil Referral Units and Alternative Curriculum Units to get pupils back into mainstream school.

The Virtual School has worked alongside staff within schools and settings, providing strategies to overcome issues around behaviour of children and young people that prevent engagement in learning. The team liaise between schools and families signposting to appropriate agencies when necessary. This work has enabled some of the most

vulnerable Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners to sustain and remain in main stream Education either in their own schools or through managed moves or if needed find appropriate provision in PRUs and ACUs.

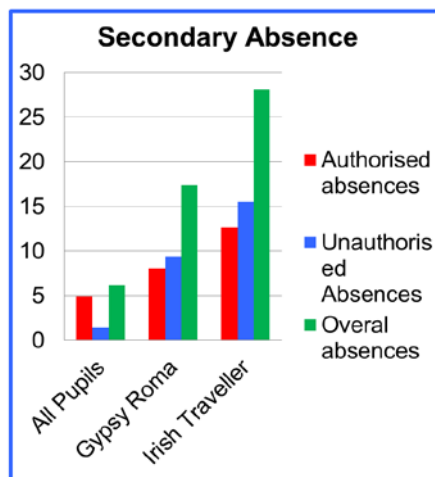
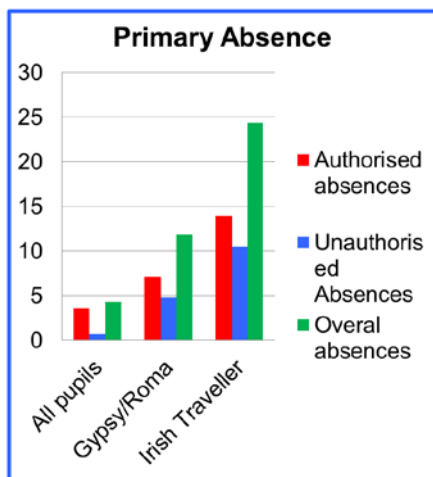
Students... at risk of permanent exclusion with issues such as: being unable to engage in class; rudeness to staff and aggressive outbursts. [Now there are]...much more minor offences such as lack of homework or chatting. The mentoring sessions have helped pupils manage their anger and given them something to look forward to". Secondary Pilot School Assistant Head



As evidenced above there has been a downwards trajectory in 2012-13 following an increase in GRT permanent exclusions in 2010 -12. This coincides with an upward trajectory in fixed term exclusions over the same period. This could be down to Kent's objective to reduce the number of permanent exclusions during the same period.

IMPROVING ATTENDANCE

Kent Gypsy, Roma and Traveller absence data shows that Gypsy/Roma attendance improved during 2011 – 12, however there was a downward trend for pupils from the Irish Traveller community, who in Kent are generally more mobile.



(Source: KCC Management Information)

Changes to regulations which came into force on 1st September 2013 have increased the penalties that may be payable for unauthorised absence and provide that term time leave can only be authorised by head teachers where an application has been made in advance and the head considers the circumstances for the leave to be "exceptional". The team will now take an active part in ensuring that both schools and the GRT community are aware of these provisions. There is still a great deal of work to be done to close the gap in attendance between GRT pupils and others.

Outreach officers continue to work in partnership with the Attendance Team and schools to improve Gypsy, Roma and Traveller attendance. The Virtual School proactively engaged the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community in the Department for Education's consultation on Section 444 (6) of the Education Act that gives mobile families a defence if

prosecuted for non-attendance in certain circumstances relating to this mobility. The Department's response to the consultation has yet to be published.

SUMMARY

The Introduction of the Virtual Head Teacher role, especially as part of a Department for Education pilot gave this position more kudos and opened doors in schools resulting in Head Teachers being more receptive to advice on raising the attainment and inclusion of their Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils.

The Virtual school will continue to be advocates for the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community by developing professional, trusting relationships which enable open and insightful discussions. We will support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, young people, families and community members to challenge schools when necessary. In order to ensure that appropriate pathways into education are identified and secured we will continue to consult with GRT children, young people and their families about their future aspirations.

One of the most successful ventures that has increased the credibility of the team and also strengthened links with the community is the appointment of an English Gypsy/Irish Traveller Outreach Officer to the team. This young man has been a positive role model from the community within the service. He has provided mentoring and curriculum support for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people and been an effective family liaison officer with vulnerable families. Our aim is to train this GRT Outreach Officer to have the necessary skills to recruit volunteers from the community with an aim to future employment in similar roles.

Pilot schools have shown improvement in attendance, behaviour, involvement, motivation and declaration of most pupils, with some measurable increase in attainment. We will now launch these schools as Champions of Good Practice with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people within their areas. A Secondary Inclusion Lead from a pilot school has contributed to LA training and schools looking for best practice in this field are already being signposted to our Champion Schools.

SIGs, Hubs and Drop-Ins have enabled us to strategically access numbers of professionals ensuring that good practice is shared, issues reflected upon and resolved through open discussions.

The team have continued to work in schools to raise awareness, respect and understanding of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture, history and beliefs which has raised the self esteem of individuals and families and supported community cohesion.

"Prior to the project the Traveller children very much kept their culture to themselves or within their cultural group of friends; the project... has enabled the Traveller children to improve their academic outcomes, whilst increasing their self-confidence in speaking more openly about their cultural heritage." Primary School Inclusion Coordinator
These activities have also enabled families to feel safe to declare their ethnicity.

Outreach Officers have been working jointly with the CME and Inclusion team to ensure that children who are missing education are placed in an appropriate school. They have also been working closely with families to check that they have freely chosen to elect for home education and have been given all the necessary information and support to confirm that this is the right decision for their child.

"The Virtual School is a very valid part of the Education system, it is important to have Travellers represented. People who understand our culture and can help our children do well. The community need to have someone out there; support for the families is just as important as for the children. Many often feel isolated; this gives people a point of contact when needed". Member of the Traveller community actively involved in education

"The Virtual School Project is an opportunity to explore all sorts of options for increasing the attendance and attainment of Traveller pupils, not only in Kent, but for use across the country. This is such an important issue, especially to widen the life-options for teenage Traveller girls."

The Virtual Head Teacher and her small team have made an excellent start in exploring the data, and working with those schools who have made most headway on excellent practice.

What we need now is partly to work with other schools to adopt the best ideas, and partly to keep on pursuing new ideas, including to minimise exclusions, minimise unnecessary and unwanted Elective Home Education, and make known successful Traveller pupils a regular visible feature within Kent schools". Manager of Gypsy Traveller Unit

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS and NEXT STEPS

Since writing this report there has been a restructure within the Education department, the Advisory Teachers and Outreach Officers from the Virtual School for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils have been placed in different directorates , with the Outreach Officers working in the Early Help and Preventative Services Directorate and the Advisory Teachers working within the Quality and Standards Directorate under School Improvement. The working conditions of the Outreach Officers have been changed to enable support to be available for GRT families during school holidays. The role of the Virtual Head Teacher will be to ensure that these professionals with their great understanding of the barriers faced by many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families and knowledge of how to overcome these, continue to work together to ensure that colleagues within Kent are able to deliver positive outcomes for this community.

The GRT Virtual Headteacher role has been merged with the Manager of the Inclusion Support Service Kent role enabling the work to be continued and developed as part of the offer to support all vulnerable learners in Kent. GRT conferences and CPD training will include feedback on pilot project including contributions from leads in schools and case studies of good practice. Lessons learnt from the project will be shared at established SIGs, Hubs and Surgeries.

