Tackling Racism and Prejudice towards Gypsies and Travellers in School.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with more general guidance on the 2010 Equalities Act and good practice in preventing and tackling prejudice related incidents in the school setting.

Why is specific guidance needed for tackling racism and prejudice towards Gypsies and Travellers?

“Racism towards most ethnic minority groups is now hidden, less frequently expressed in public, and widely seen as unacceptable. However, that towards Gypsies and Travellers is still common, frequently overt and seen as justified. Abusive media coverage and overtly racist statements from local and national politicians add to the ignorance and prejudice of many members of the settled population, while those in authority frequently fail to challenge them.” Equality and Human Rights Commission 2009

In 2009 the DCFS acknowledged the impact of society’s racism on Gypsy and Traveller children’s access to education:

“Both the oral and written history of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller of Irish heritage communities confirm the reality of racist persecution and discrimination faced by these communities over many centuries. Many parents are thus concerned not to expose their children to the negative and damaging impact of prejudice and discrimination at school. They make judgements in this context, based on their own difficult experiences of school, and fear the manifestation of prejudice in the form of teachers’ attitudes and racist bullying by peers.” (Moving Forward Together Book 1, DCFS 2009)

This article has been derived from a number of sources and is a brief guide for schools. Although it is focused on Gypsy and Traveller children, the guidance is relevant for all forms of prejudice related incidents.

Schools statutory responsibilities.

English Gypsies and Irish Travellers are recognised as distinct ethnic minority groups in law, as such they are granted the full protection of the Equalities Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. Schools therefore must have due regard to the need to:
• Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.

• Advance equality of opportunity between pupils who are Travellers and others in the school.

• Foster good relations between pupils who are Travellers and others in the school.

Steps to avoiding racism against Gypsies and Travellers in the school setting.

• The school’s commitment to preventing and addressing prejudice related and racist incidents is clearly stated in the school prospectus.

• There are clear guidelines for staff, students and parents about what constitutes a prejudice related incident and management of racist incidents. This is regularly reviewed with stakeholders.

• The general ethos of the school, displays, assemblies, curriculum, books and resources, reflect and affirm diversity of language, culture, religion and appearance, including Gypsy and Travellers’ cultures.

• There are opportunities in the school curriculum, for example, through PSHE and citizenship, to teach about intolerance and prejudice, and about campaigns, projects and legislation to promote justice and equality, rights and responsibilities.

• There are opportunities in the school curriculum for students to learn and practice the social skills necessary to enable open discussion of controversial issues in our society.

Pre-requisites for restorative and transformative approaches to tackling prejudice related bullying, harassment and victimisation in the school setting.

• Governors, senior leaders and staff of the school have received training in understanding the definition of a racist incident and the impact of racist bullying on the education of children and young people.

• Governors, senior leaders and staff maintain a log of prejudice related incidents. This is monitored on a regular basis and if patterns emerge, there is
a strategic response, which is linked to the Equalities Objectives and School development plan.

- All staff of the school have been trained in appropriate restorative and transformative approaches to tackling prejudice related incidents and implement these correctly.

**Restorative and transformative approaches to tackling racist incidents.**

The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Macpherson) report recommended that a racist incident should be defined as follows:

“A racist incident is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person.”

Hence, there is no ambiguity; any incident reported at school, as racist, whatever the circumstances, requires the same response.

In tackling a racist incident consider

1. What to do to support the child or young person at the receiving end
2. How to challenge those who are responsible

**What to do to support the child or young person on the receiving end.**

- Accept the pupil’s account of the incident and provide solidarity and support.
- Do not make light of the incident or minimise its importance.
- Confirm that it was right for the pupil to approach you and inform you.
- Ask what action the pupil would like to take place.
- Discuss whether the pupil would like other pupils to help solve the situation that has arisen.
- Contact the pupil’s parents, as soon as possible, explain what has happened, that the school does not tolerate such behaviour and what the school is doing to try to put things right.
- Stress that the pupil is not the cause of the incident.
- Seek to instil pride in the pupil’s heritage.
- If there were witnesses to the incident ensure they know that your sympathies are with the pupil at the receiving end of the racist incident and in no way with those who are responsible for it.

**Challenging those who are responsible.**
• Make it clear to the responsible pupil/member of staff that, whatever the circumstance, what they have said/done is wrong.

• Remind the responsible person of the school’s ethos, behaviour and bullying policy. Apply sanctions fairly and consistently as laid down in those policies.

• Explain why racism is wrong, and demonstrate with facts and rationality that racist beliefs are both false and harmful.

• Explain why racism is distinctively hurtful.

• Acknowledge that many people, young and old, have anxieties about identity and territory and desire to belong to secure groups, which may have a culture of prejudice.

• Acknowledge that it is not only the behaviour of the responsible person that should be challenged, but also sections of the media in presenting and perpetuating negative stereotypes of certain communities and groups.

• Present positive information about Gypsy and Traveller groups and use available resources to tackle prejudice e.g.


• Help the responsible person to understand their own behaviour and as appropriate, to change it.

• Employ restorative approaches to enable the person responsible to take responsibility for their actions and repair the damage that they have caused. If appropriate, the responsible person can be supported to apologise to the pupil on the receiving end and explain what the incident has taught them.

A note about context and culture.

Racist incidents often occur within the context of a wider incident. Clearly the whole incident will require appropriate intervention by consistently and fairly applying the school’s behaviour and anti-bullying policy. However, the racist element of the incident “goes to the very roots of someone’s identity and sense of belonging, and attacks not only the individual child but also his or her parents and grandparents and the wider community and tradition to which they belong” (Bullying about racism, religion and culture DES 2006)

and therefore must be managed separately, as described in the guidance above.
“It is recognised that it may not be realistic to expect Gypsy Traveller pupils not to stand up for themselves in the face of violence or particularly hurtful name calling as they are brought up to stand up for themselves.”

An aggressive response to racism in the school environment will require the implementation and consistent, fair application of the school’s behaviour policy, however, the racist incident will still require appropriate intervention as described above.

Further Resources.

“Atch Poggering Mande. Stop Bullying Me,” is an audio CD which explores Traveller children’s experiences of racism at school. It can be purchased from Cambridgeshire Race Equality and Diversity Service, Team for Traveller Education Telephone: 01223 703882

Training for staff.

For further support and guidance, or for staff training, please make a referral to the Equality and Diversity Achievement Service or the Anti-Bullying Co-ordinator at Oxfordshire County Council.
http://schools.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/gypsy-roma-and-travellers-achievement
http://schools.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/anti-bullying