

# Roma families in Hampshire schools

## Background information

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.

There are Roma populations in all European countries and 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 originate from central European countries such as Poland, Hungary, Romania, Czech Republic and Bulgaria.

## Ascription

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.

They do not like to be classed as Gypsies or Travellers and will rarely ascribe to these groups. They tend instead to identify themselves according to their country of origin and tick the WOTH (White Other) box on forms rather than WROM (White Roma).

## Languages

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.

Roma children will also speak the language of their country of origin.

## Previous education

In many European Countries, Roma children are segregated from the wider community and educated separately in 'Special Schools' just for Roma. As a result, when they move to the UK parents may ask if their children can attend a special school. This does not mean the child necessarily has a Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND).

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 an expectation that Roma children will not and cannot achieve academically and there are therefore low expectations from their teachers - which may lead to low aspirations and attainment from Roma students.

## Building relationships with Roma families

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.

Staff should be circumspect when thinking about a pupil's background and look for similarities to other Gypsy/Traveller children e.g. patterns of attendance, disrupted schooling due to travelling or unexplained absences, interests like sports e.g. boxing, fishing, horse riding. If they believe a child may be Roma, staff should not ask them outright unless the relationship between the school and family is robust enough to support this. Instead, they should work to gain the trust of the whole family through open conversations whilst at the same time ensuring there is a full package of support available that addresses both EAL and GRT-related needs.

School can request cultural awareness training for staff to enable them to recognise any barriers to learning presented by subjects like Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) and to be able to give the appropriate support to the child to maximise progress.

## What should I do if I think a Roma child has joined our school?

The child should be supported as any other new arrival. If they have little or no English and require first language support, they should be referred to EMTAS in the usual way by filling out the referral form at:

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/educationandlearning/emtas/new-referrals/referrals>

An EMTAS practitioner will arrange to come into school to meet the child and their family to gather background information including prior education, medical issues, the family structure, interests, languages spoken and understood and any relevant experiences the child has had.

If staff believe the child may be of Roma heritage, they can also access GRT support for transition to help them settle in and to aid retention in school.

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

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/educationandlearning/emtas>

Email: [EMTAS@hants.gov.uk](mailto:EMTAS@hants.gov.uk)

Telephone: 01256 330195

Further information on Roma communities can be found at: <http://romaeducationsupporttrust.weebly.com/roma-in-the-uk.html>

## Best practice when working with Roma children and their families

- Have a named member of staff who has cultural knowledge of the Roma communities who will be a point of contact for the families and the pupil.
- Invite families into school for informal chats over coffee about the education system and expectations on attendance and progress, parents evenings etc.
- Explain about Free School Meals and offer support with the online application where needed.
- Provide new arrivals with a starter pack including basic equipment e.g. pen, pencil, ruler.
- Introduce the New Arrival Ambassadors Scheme or Young Interpreters Scheme into your school to help support the newly arrived child.
- Inform parents about free healthcare for their children and provide them with appropriate and accessible information about local amenities like doctors, dentist, Citizens Advice etc.
- Provide families with information about school clubs and clubs in the community for children.
- Help the family fill in any forms they may have to complete.
- Provide families with information about the EMTAS language phonelines. They can access first language support through the phoneline service should they have any questions about their child's education.
- Book staff cultural awareness training through EMTAS.
- Further information on Roma communities can be found at: