AGENDA - PART I

Enc. 12.  **Travellers’ Education Service:** (Pages 1 - 6)
Report of the Director of Learning and Community Development.

AGENDA - PART II - NIL

Special Circumstances and Reasons for Urgency

In accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the following agenda items have been admitted late to the agenda by virtue of special circumstances and urgency detailed below:-

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<th>Agenda item</th>
<th>Special circumstances/Grounds for Urgency</th>
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<td>12. Travellers’ Education Service</td>
<td>This report was a late addition to the agenda and was subsequently unavailable at the time the main agenda was printed and circulated. Members are requested to consider this item in line with the Sub-Committee’s request to receive a report on the Travellers’ Education Service.</td>
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Section 1: Summary

This is a report about the work and role of the Traveller Achievement Service.

Decision Required

To note and comment on the report submitted.

Reason for report

At the Sub-Committee meeting on 13 October, during the discussion on the Education Service Review, members expressed an interest to know more about this Service.

Benefits

The report outlines the benefits of a service to support the achievement of children from traveller families.
Section 2: Report

Background

2.1 A number of different groups are covered by the generic term Traveller: English and Welsh Gypsies, Irish and Scottish Travellers, Showmen (fairground people) and Circus People, Bargees (occupational boat dwellers) and New Travellers. Most of these communities have a long tradition of a travelling lifestyle, although their customs and history vary.

2.2 The term Traveller is acceptable to most members of these groups because Gypsy is a term that can be perceived as having negative connotations and is only acceptable to some. This is the case with families from Eastern and Central Europe for whom ‘Roma’ is very much the universally preferred term.

2.3 In 1968 the Government passed the Caravan Sites Act, which stated that from 1970 councils should provide caravan sites for Travellers in England. Records show that the Harrow site at Watling Farm was made an official site for travellers in 1974. There were 15 bays at the site, accommodating a potential of 15 families. At that time there were about 40 families living as part of the settled community in houses and in flats in Harrow. Watling farm site was closed down in 1999. The travellers who were living on site were rehoused across the borough, with the majority rehoused in the Edgware area.

2.4 The current Traveller population in Harrow are mainly of Irish Traveller heritage. Romany Gypsies and Travellers of Irish heritages are recognised ethnic groups under the Race Relations Act 1976. Under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 schools have a statutory duty to promote race equality.
The Traveller Achievement Service (TAS)

2.6 The Traveller Achievement Service is located within the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service as part of School Development Services.

2.7 In common with other LEAs, this specialist team works alongside schools, Governing Bodies and other agencies to promote educational approaches which are positively inclusive of Gypsy Traveller experiences and lifestyles. Staff provide practical advice and support to schools and Educational Welfare Officers to establish good communications with families, explain the importance of regular attendance to their child’s progress at school, and support outreach work to build up successful relationships with Gypsy Traveller families and communities.

2.8 The Service is set within the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS) and line managed by the Team Leader for EMAS. It is based at the Harrow Teachers’ Centre.

2.9 The Traveller Service consists of:
- the Advisory Teacher for Traveller Pupils;
- 2 Teachers for traveller pupils : 1.7 full time equivalent (fte) working in schools;
- 2 Teaching Assistants : 1.5 fte working in schools; and
- a link Education Welfare Officer (0.5).

2.10 The Service is funded from the DfES Standard Fund grant for Vulnerable Children which is designed to secure improved access to education, more regular school attendance and satisfactory levels of achievement of a range of children, including those with a Gypsy Traveller background who may be at particular risk of educational and social exclusion.

2.11 The Service contributes to a number of initiatives across the council, including in particular the LPSA work in the Canons cluster. They are also currently working with a Family Support Worker, funded through the Education Welfare Service.

Data

2.12 Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) figures for 2004 identified 117 pupils who described themselves as White Irish Traveller, which is 0.4% of the percentage of pupils as a whole. 6 pupils were described as White Gypsy/Roma heritage. The PLASC figures are often not reflective of true numbers in schools as they rely on families self identifying. Figures from the TAS suggest there are over 200 pupils in Harrow schools.
2.13 The children and young people are scattered across the authority, but with slightly higher numbers in Pinner Wood, Little Stanmore, Glebe, Norbury, Whitefriars and Canons High schools.

2.14 Attendance at primary school is rising; the average attendance for 2003-2004 being 82%, but as the young people move into secondary education many begin to drift away from formal education. There is an assumption that schooling is seen as a low priority for the Traveller community, but the recent Harrow Irish Travellers Project (March 2004) found that the more settled community in Harrow wanted to see their children educated. Families were particularly keen to see more opportunities for young people to engage in vocational training, more suitable to their culture and traditions.

2.15 Due to the poor experiences of many adults, some travellers have shunned the formality of school life, preferring to preserve the cultural identity of the traveller life. A child who has reached puberty is considered an adult and expected to work – sons learning a trade with their fathers and daughters helping their mothers with domestic duties and childcare. The families are suspicious of secondary schools and the chances of teenagers being exposed to drugs and other activities at odds with the Traveller traditions. There is also a common fear of racist abuse and bullying.

2.16 According to the OFSTED report, ‘Provision and support for Traveller Pupils’ (2003) 50% of Gypsy and Traveller children in the country are registered as having Special Educational Needs and an increased risk of exclusion.

Aiming High

2.17 The TAS is a small team who spread their expertise widely. Latterly, working alongside schools to raise the profile of the Traveller community in schools through targeted support, careful monitoring of progress and close liaison with schools, parents and other agencies. The Service also runs training programmes centrally and locally to all schools and Early Years settings.

2.18 Last academic year the team were involved in a successful Connexions funded project, which was published in March 2004. This Transition project was set up to encourage continuity of learning post 14. The project sought to provide access to guidance and support to enable the Traveller community to engage in education, training or employment and have a successful transition into adulthood. Nationally Traveller pupils are still the group most ‘at risk’ in the education system.

2.19 Occasionally, tensions exist between communities in Harrow schools. A lack of understanding can lead to conflict. The Service and schools work hard to deal with encountered prejudices. A few Traveller boys in particular have caused schools to use exclusion, temporarily or, on occasion, permanently.
The issues of behaviour are those experienced by some other groups of pupils, the Traveller Achievement Service respond promptly when notified, to try to support any pupil at risk of exclusion. A member of the Service is of Traveller heritage and promotes a positive link between the establishment and the distinctive cultural identity of the Traveller community.

2.20 There are examples of Harrow schools making a difference, particularly where there is a determination to meet the needs of traveller pupils. These schools have worked hard to build relationships with their families, track progress over time, use the curriculum to celebrate the diversity of the Traveller community and seek active partnership, not necessarily dependence on, the Traveller Achievement Service.

2.21 **Legal Implications**
There are no legal implications arising from the contents of this report

2.22 **Equalities Impact**
The work of the Traveller Achievement Service contributes to Harrow’s equality policies and plans.

**Section 3: Supporting Information/ Background Documents**

The following background documents are available on request:
Education Service Review 2003/4
Aiming High: Raising the achievement of Gipsy Traveller Pupils A guide to Good Practice (DfES 2003)
Provision and Support for Traveller Pupils (Ofsted 2003)