**Good Practice Strategies to support Pupils from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities**

Throughout this document, the collective term 'Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT)' will be used.This collective group includes:

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| Scottish Travellers or Gypsies | Welsh Gypsies or Travellers | Gypsies |
| Roma | Travellers of Irish heritage | Show people |
| Fairground families | Circus families | Bargee or Canal boat families |
| New Travellers |  |  |

Please use this document as a reference tool to give you some ideas on how to address some of the issues that might arise working with some GRT families.

**What are the differences between the indigenous GRT populations and the new migrant Roma communities?**

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| **UK & Irish GRT** | **New migrant Roma communities** |
| Have been in the UK for 500 years. | Have mainly been in the UK for ten years or less. |
| Are familiar with using English and can communicate effectively by oral and aural means.Written communication maybe more difficult and parents may have mixed literacy skills. | Are unfamiliar with using English and face-to-face, phone or written contact in English is problematic. |
| Many have access to a wide range ofagencies who can support them. | Many have no idea how to obtain their rights and have nochampions. |
| Many still travel. | Have been settled (voluntarily or forcibly) for at least three generations. |
| Contributed to the society they live amongst on an equal footing during WW2. | Lost a very high percentage of their population in the Holocaust, partly due to the actions of the society they lived amongst, and this defines their attitudes towards the non-Roma population even to this day. |
| Are familiar with the UK education system and protocols. | Find the UK education system confusing and different from that in the country of origin. |
| Accept the term ‘Gypsy’ with pride. | Do not like being called ‘Gypsy’ (which is the word used on most official forms asking them to declare their identity) and prefer the word, Roma. |
| **Common Underlying Issues** |
| Both populations belong to the groups of people known as Romani and are recognised, regardless of their passport, as a people without a country. The two suffer from discrimination from the communities they live amongst, low levels of literacy and lack of qualifications. They have high levels of unemployment and poverty. They are reluctant to tell people from outside their community that they are Gypsy or Roma. |

 **Supporting successful transition for GRT pupils**

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|  **Barriers to transition** | **Strategies** |
| **Stereotypes about the way things are done for GRT children***“GRT girls don’t go to secondary school.”**“I can’t see the point of him going to secondary.”**“They need to follow a Traveller way of life.”**“These children need to get manual jobs.”**“She needs to stay at home to look after her sisters.”* | * CHALLENGE opinions!
* Explain that many GRT children need education to get better jobs, including functional literacy and numeracy.
* Explain that a primary education is not enough to read and write well.
* Explain how they will have more choices in their life.
* Girls need an education too in the 21st century. They can help around the house after school.
* The Traveller Movement and other GRT groups recommend every child should finish secondary school.
* Highlight famous and successful GRT people, including academics.
* Share good news about their child and what their ability can lead to if they stay in school.
* Challenge the expectations of staff directly by setting a high aspiration target.
* Talk about health, wealth, happiness through having choices!
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| **Parents are not sure if****they will send their child to****secondary school.** | * Have targeted conversations with all GRT parents from year 3 onwards. Encourage other GRT parents whose children went to secondary school and had a positive experience to talk at an event to other GRT parents.
* Raise awareness about how to apply for a secondary school place and offer support.
* Offer support through the process, factoring in the literacy challenges of no support.
* Invite parents to give honest opinions about the pros and cons of secondary school transition, so there can be a dialogue.
* Track all GRT pupils from year 5,6 and identify which parents have identified a school, which have applied for a school place. Offer any additional support to complete an application.
* Ask the child what they want and ensure the parent is clear about the child’s views.
* Go the extra mile with GRT families!!! Ensure they get a targeted approach from a key member of staff with
* additional meetings to reassure and provide key support.
* Refer parents where there is no evidence of a school application completed by early September of year 6 to LA
* participation team.
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 **Supporting successful transition for GRT pupils**

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| **Barriers to transition** | **Strategies** |
| **Dropping out in year 7 & 8** | * Secondary school to identify a key member of SLT to monitor
* and track GRT pupils through the school, but especially in years 7 & 8.
* Reach out to GRT parents to help them understand how secondary school is different to primary. What some of the challenges will be for all pupils. Reassure them that you will be tracking their children to ensure they enjoy school.
* Provide them with a key contact on staff for any issues that arise.
* Share good news regularly with lots of praise. Monitor closely attendance, behaviour and bullying.
* Ask child regularly how they are enjoying school and address any issues.
* If they are behind or potentially classed as SEND for any reason, ensure they are assessed early and strategies are put in place to support their strengths and needs.
* Many speech, language and communication issues can be addressed in mainstream classrooms. Discuss with LA Speech and Language Therapist if needed.
* Encourage GRT pupil feedback by organising specific feedback groups of GRT pupils where they can talk honestly and openly about their daily experience of school. Act upon any issues that arise.
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| **Post-16 transition** | * Provide careers information and guidance early (year 8) so GRT pupils know what options are available to them, including vocational pathways.
* Offer individual and group GRT careers sessions to help them explore their options.
* If there are concerns, they may end up as NEET, make the LA aware of this early.
* Track their destination in year 12, so you know they went into education, employment or training.
* Recognise they may be under a lot of peer pressure to drop out.
* Identify a key mentor to regularly check in on them and keep them on track.
* Encourage them to consider what they are good at and what they could possibly do with those skills.
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 **How do schools ensure GRT pupils are included and welcomed into school life?**

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| **Barriers to****successful admission** | **Strategies** |
| **GRT parents may****struggle to fill out forms, applications on paper or online.** | * Many parents may have weak literacy in English and will struggle

to complete written forms and read information without support. This includes online forms and applications.* Find out if support is needed and help them to do so.
* Identify a key person to help with this and ensure GRT parents know who this is.
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| **Admission interview does not consider the typical experience of GRT children and does not seek to address these from the outset.** | * **Gypsy, Traveller:** Be welcoming about GRT communities and explain the importance to the school of respecting identities.
* **Roma:** Where possible, use a member of the Roma community during the original interview to offer reassurance.
* **All:** reassure them their child will be well looked after, that bullying is not tolerated and provide a key contact person for them if they have any issues, concerns.
* Conduct a tour of the school and show them where GRT culture is visible in the school.
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| **GRT parents often have had negative experiences of school and may****have low expectations.** | * Be reassuring and address possible fears from the beginning.
* Find an opportunity to contact the family to praise the child soon after admission. Make sure good news is regularly shared.
* Explain how GRT parents views are welcomed and can help shape how the school educated their children. Sow these seeds and ask for their help.
* Use GRT staff at admission alongside member of SLT to show that GRT community is respected.
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**How do schools with good ascription encourage parents to ascribe as Gypsy, Roma or Traveller?**

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| **Barriers to****ascription** | **Strategies** |
| **Admission form –****Many Travellers do not see themselves reflected in the categories,****e.g., British Traveller, Showman****Many admission forms use the ascription****‘Gypsy/Roma. Many Roma will not check the word Gypsy.** | * Adapt your categories to reflect the different types of Travellers.
* Seek advice from the LA if needed.
* Make ‘Gypsy’ and ‘Roma’ separate categories on separate parts of your form. There is no restriction on doing this.
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| **Admission interview** | * **Gypsy, Traveller:** Be welcoming about GRT communities

and explain the importance to the school of respecting identities. Explain how correct ascription will give a child more pride which will help at school.* Explain too how the information will be treated.
* **Roma:** Where possible, use a member of the Roma

community during the original interview to offer reassurance. |
| **School ethos** | * If your school ethos is perceived by the community to be ‘Gypsy,

Roma or Traveller’ friendly then correct ascription will be easier.* If the school believes ascription is important then it is more likely to happen.
* Where schools find a way to tell pupils and the community, they should be proud to be ‘GRT,’ not embarrassed, ascription improves.
* Where GRT culture is recognised, celebrated and visible in school, ascription improves.
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| **You know the pupil is****‘Gypsy, Roma or****Traveller’ but they are ascribed as ‘Other White or Other White European.’** | * Make a home visit with a GRT heritage worker. A new form has
* to be completed and signed.
* However, you cannot overplay this and the GRT worker should take the lead in deciding when to stop pressing for a change in ascription.
* Remember that the right to choose the ascription lies with the family and not the school. This means you cannot change ascriptions on your school system just because you know the true ascription.
* Regular engagement with parents may lead some parents to be prepared to change their ascription.
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| **The school or the****community cannot see****‘What’s in it for me?’** | * Use pages from DCSF (2007:19–22) *The Inclusion of GRT Children*

*and Young People* (see attached sheet on next page). |
| **Respect the****need for confidentiality** | * Gypsy, Roma or traveller families may trust a school enough to ascribe as GRT, but in some cases they do not want others to know this. So be careful when inviting visitors from other agencies to meetings with parents from GRT communities.
* Ask families in advance so they can give consent and explain why other visitors will be attending meetings.
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The National Strategies Moving forward together: Raising Gypsy, Roma and Traveller achievement Booklet 4: Engagement with parents, carers and the wider community

**Parents: Why should I ascribe my child’s ethnicity – what’s in it for me?**

* Most parents across the world want their children to grow up to be proud of their family and its heritage.
* There is nothing to be ashamed of in being a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller.
* It is a human right for the world to respect you for who you really are.
* It is important to children’s psychological, social and personal development for them to be proud of their family and its cultural heritage.
* Most parents across the world want their children to have the freedom to be happy and confident in their self knowledge and to be able to share freely, and to be treated with respect

for who they really are.

* Racists will never be challenged and exposed for what they are by the silence of fear.
* Most parents want their children to have happy lives in which they learn to relate to and respect others with different and diverse backgrounds so that they may live together in peace and

harmony. This important process is promoted and experienced at school but it requires everyone to have the confidence to be open and honest.

* Parents who tell their children to deny their ethnicity place an unfair burden on their children and a disadvantage that is not suffered by other children.
* Your children have a right to education and it is not conditional on them hiding their ethnicity or cultural identity.
* Your children’s happy and successful learning will often need them to draw on and share their life experiences within your family and community. They will not be able to do that if they are

fearful about the school knowing who they really are.

* Your children will also be unable to bring home examples of completed work that they and you should be proud of because it portrays a treasured truth about your culture and way of life. This

will deny them the happiness that most children experience during their school years.

* When you are invited to the school assembly to celebrate your children’s successful achievements, for which they may receive applause, you will be unable to claim the praise and

respect for your family’s and community’s ethnicity and cultural status. Yet another opportunity will be lost to flag your children’s and family’s positive contribution to the life and work of the school.

* Childhood should be full of happiness and it is short enough without the burden of having to keep a closely guarded secret and living in the fear of ‘exposure.’
* If your children go to school in fear of disclosing their ethnic identity, they will find it hard to make friends and may feel socially isolated and lonely. This experience should not be part of a

happy childhood at school and is seldom part of successful learning.

* Your children’s teachers will not be able to help them as much as they would if they knew about their ethnicity and cultural background.
* If your children need additional teaching support, this may not be possible unless the school is fully aware of the ethnicity of the children.
* Most parents across the world want their children to be treated equally and fairly when at school. A hidden identity is a serious threat to enjoying a fulfilled life at school.

 Schools can talk to parents about these benefits and use this process to build even stronger partnerships with them, reassuring them that the school takes seriously its responsibilities in terms of its vision and values.

 **Interventions to improve attendance which schools say work**

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| **Barriers to good****attendance** | **Strategies** |
| **The baggage they bring with them.****Transport issues and refusal to use public transport due to fears of discrimination and bullying.****Returning to the country of origin in term-time because tickets are cheaper.****Staying at home to interpret for parents.****Staying at home to look after younger siblings.****Attending medical or dental appointments during the day and not coming into school before or after.** | * Gain the trust of the community by building a positive relationship with them.
* Inform them in ways they can access.
* Explain the importance of good attendance at interview with GRT families. Ask if there are any reasons that might prevent good attendance and identify ways to mitigate this.
* Be supportive and explain the benefits of communicating with the school where there are problems.
* (One school has made a film explaining the UK education system, including all the procedures, protocols and consequences connected to attendance. They have put a soundtrack in Roma, Czech and Slovak for the benefit of parents who cannot read in any language. All the issues to the left are addressed in the film.)
* Be consistent about following up on their attendance. Look to reward or praise GRT pupils regularly for good attendance.
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| **Drifting back in late** **September, long after the start of the new academic year.** | * One school noticed that this undermined one whole school

strategy. Their migrant Roma assumed the attendance count started when they returned and not from the first day of term. The school had a system of ‘ready reckoners’ to show pupils how one week’s good attendance would raise their overall attendance and equally how a day’s or two days’ absence would have the reverse impact. The Roma would not use these because of resentment at starting with a two or three-week deficit meaning they could never get to the target of 95%.* The school now phones each family, using a Roma worker, during June to remind them of the dates for the new terms and the importance of making travel arrangements to fit in with these. This has greatly reduced the amount of September absence.
* Many schools reported issuing fines for term-time absence in

the country of origin. |

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| **Barriers to good****attendance** | **Strategies** |
| **Not having the bus fare** | * One school buys monthly bus passes in bulk and resells them to

pupils for £8 less than the normal price. Families had been buying day tickets, which are more expensive than a monthly pass. If there was no money in the house, they could not buy a bus ticket. Now they still have the pass even when there is no money.* One school put bus tickets in its reward scheme.
 |
| **Being disorganised/****dysfunctional as a****family** | * Phone the evening before to remind that PE kit, uniform, etc.

need to be made ready for the morning.* Alternatively, provide a checklist for parents of kit to bring for particular days.
* Use a Think Family worker or whatever terminology is used in your area for the Problem Families Programme.
* Collect them by car (follow safeguarding procedures).
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| **Barriers to good****attendance** | **Strategies** |
| **Pupils leave home on****time but do not arrive on****time.** | * One school sends a TA and GRT liaison worker to bus stops

used by the Roma pupils to notice who has not arrived. The* Roma worker then phones them.
* Pupils not arriving by 9 o’clock are phoned and told there is still time to set off for school.
* One school found a family had no alarm clock so provided one.
* Then it was discovered nobody in the house could tell the time. So parents and children were given lessons in telling the time! The children attend better and more punctually now.
* Open discussion with parents/carers/pupils to discuss why they do not arrive on time. This can help to discover potential barriers that they may face.
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| **Safety fears** | * Primary schools in a northern city use walking buses, where
* TAs collect pupils from several homes and walk to school together.
* Schools arrange for pupils to travel together on the same bus.
* Ask a member of staff who travels to work by bus to use the same bus as the students.
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| **Communication****difficulties. Some****parents cannot read and write in any****language so will ignore letters concerning****attendance even if they are translated.** | * One school records the essential points of certain letters in the

home language and uses a system of QR codes to make it possible for the parent to hear the recording using their mobile phone. (Any such schemes need to be carefully modelled to the parents)* Several schools use a home language speaker to follow up standard attendance letters with a phone call to check that the letter has not only been received but also understood.
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| **Barriers to good attendance** | **Strategies** |
| **Some families under-****stand the need to give an explanation for absence on the first day but do not like negotiating the school switchboard.** | * One school allocates extension numbers that families can phone

directly without going through the switchboard. They can leave messages to explain absence on the voicemail.* Schools have made short pro-forma which requires the parent to tick a relevant reason from a list to make reporting reasons for absence easier.
* Alternatively, a way for parents to text the school to explain absence.
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| **The Friday group****syndrome.** **Several schools – primary and secondary – reported having groups of Roma pupils who were consistently absent on Fridays.** | * Several schools reported presenting parents with the attendance printouts, showing the pattern and asking them to address it.
* Two schools had created a fun activity for Friday last lesson for Roma pupils which they could only join if they had attended all week. This improved attendance for the group (20 female pupils from Years 7, 8 and 9) in one school by 8% from term 1 to term 2. Once regular patterns were established the group was discontinued.
* The same school offered free football coaching from 15 minutes before school through registration to Roma boys, providing they had attended every day since the previous session.
 |
| **General motivation** | * Schools have found all sorts of GRT friendly reward

schemes.* One offers an ice-skating trip at the end of the year for above 95% attendance.
* Ask GRT pupils what they would want as a reward for good attendance.
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| **Barriers to good****attendance** | **Strategies** |
| **Cultural differences** | * Show cultural sensitivity, for example:
* If a family member dies, then close relatives are required to gather and spend 15 days mourning. Failure to do this would be regarded as a great source of shame. Families reported being fined heavily for returning to the country of origin to carry out this duty. However, a school also referred to a case where a family had requested permission for term-time absence to mourn a grandmother on several separate occasions. The person assisting in the completion of the form had overlooked this! This is a delicate matter, but schools may wish to try to get it right both ways to build trust.
* One school noticed a big drop in Roma attendance on December 6th, as pupils stayed at home for an event as important in their culture as December 25th. In following years, they agreed the pupils could come in at the end of lesson 1, giving time to celebrate with their families, then organise and hold a St Niklas event of their own after school, sharing the event with pupils from other backgrounds. This improved attendance on this day and helped with integration.
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 **Overcoming the barriers to engaging with parents from GRT communities**

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| **Barriers to parental****engagement** | **Strategies** |
| **Language****Not just English. Some****parents may not be literate in any language so all****written communication may fail or be controlled by the pupils.** | * Make sure all standard letters are written in clear simple

English which will be easier to translate.* Use aural recorded messages of letters for parents where literacy is weak. Ask about this at admission interview and keep a clear record.
* Employ a member of the GRT community. Give them a mobile phone they can use for school business. The community can then phone them directly. This person can also distribute information to the community via social media.
* Designate extension numbers that parents may phone direct to leave voicemail messages in their native language, bypassing the school switchboard.
* **Roma:** Schools in the north of England and the East Midlands reported holding English classes for parents so that parents could have an opportunity to improve their English.
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| **Barriers to parental****engagement** | **Strategies** |
| **Parents do not understand school systems** | * One school had produced a PowerPoint which could be played

as a DVD. This presented the UK education system and school procedures visually with a voice-over in Romanes and the main language of the country of origin. This school had taken the trouble to find out about systems in the countries of origin so they could explain aspects of the UK system which parents would find confusing.* Many schools used a worker who spoke the language used by the parents to explain systems round attendance and uniform etc.
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| **Barriers to parental****engagement** | **Strategies** |
| **Parents do not trust the****school because of their experience in the country of origin.** | * Roma: Employ a member of the Roma community. Ask them

to offer reassurance to the community and to make the concerns of the community clear to the school.* Some schools reported asking their Roma worker to help families make dental appointments or eye tests for families who did not know how to do this. Though done from humane reasons a side effect was increased trust.
* Several schools reported that parents really appreciated positive contacts regarding improved attendance, good progress, etc.
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| **Coffee mornings/****social events** | * Several schools reported holding coffee mornings so that parents could have a nice experience of being in school. The most effective had an agenda. One school had a guest speaker of interest to the community foreach coffee morning. Guests came from a housing charity, the DWP explaining the changes involved with the introduction of the single universal benefit and even the police. Up to 60 parents were attending regularly.
* One school reported holding a social event outside school so parents and teachers could mingle in a positive atmosphere.
* Schools offered regular GRT specific parents drop ins to discuss issues they wanted to bring up. This was appreciated by the local community.
* Holding drop ins within local community venue, where GRT families are used to going.
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| **Parents’ evenings are not****attended by many GRT parents** | * Find out if the time was an issue. Parents maybe at work or

worried about childcare for younger siblings. Offer a meeting online.* **Roma:** One school had translated a model report and presented this to a group of Roma parents who had the current report for their child in front of them. The model report was explained by the school’s Roma worker and was completely different to a report from their country of origin. Parents could ask questions to understand what a typical report is designed to inform.
* A primary school in the north of England changed the timing of parents’ evenings. They now start straight after the end of

the day so the GRT parents can attend as they collect their children. This has improved GRT attendance at these events considerably. |

**Supporting pupils from the GRT communities to follow behaviour and conduct codes**

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| **Strategies for supporting good behaviour** | **Details and examples** |
| **Understand what they****do not understand** | * Find out about the country of origin. If there was no uniform

there, pupils may naturally be lax about wearing it in the UK.* Explain this is a requirement for all children at school. Make all these issues explicit, instead of seeing non- compliance as defiance.
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|  | * Use a buddy system so that pupils who are used to the school systems can help explain them to new arrivals.
 |
| **Be consistent** | * By consistent we mean all teachers applying rules and

sanctions in the same way to all groups.* Do not be tempted to relax some rules for your Roma pupils. But it is advisable to provide certain kinds of support in following the rules.
 |
| **Be understanding** | * Many British and Irish Travellers engage in strong ‘banter’ with

each other. This may involve strong language or ‘answering back.’ This is not meant as disrespectful and may cause problems if staff or not aware. Also, Traveller children may not understand why non- Travellers get angry by it. This will need to be explained, rather than immediately sanctioning a child. Social stories may help here.* Roma: All new arrivals will have a tendency to talk in their native language when clarifying concepts. Do not apply sanctions just for using native language, but for talking when they know they shouldn’t.
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| **Have a clear approach on bullying** | * Families of GRT report bullying as the biggest reason they

withdraw their child from school. Families report bullying of Roma in school in the country of origin as a main reason for leaving. They may be quick to claim their child is being bullied when there is a simple dispute. However, there is still a need to be clear and tough on bullying.* Bullying has also come from adults in school as well as children.
* It is important that bullying is raised as part of training and staff are vigilant to GRT pupils.
* Parents will be unfamiliar with concepts such as peer mediation and restorative justice and may misinterpret the use of such processes as weakness.
* Remain sensitive to all aspects of these issues or Roma pupils may group together and use unacceptable coping strategies in the face of what they see as provocation.
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| **Inclusion** | * Ensure GRT pupils feel included in all aspects of school life and are encouraged to add their voice.
* Remember that inclusion allows for different approaches for different groups. It is about fitting the school round the pupil not fitting the pupils to the school.
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 **Promoting involvement in extracurricular and out-of-hours activities**

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| **Barriers to participation** | **Strategies** |
| **GRT pupils do not****participate, therefore consider these options** | * Good rates of ascription and good monitoring of the participation

of all groups in extracurricular activities will make you aware of this.* Offer reassurance through contact by a GRT mentor or invite parental participation.
* The GRT mentor could remain until the end of extracurricular activities then travel home on the same bus as the pupils.
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| **Home finance makes****participation difficult** | * Some schools had systems to cover costs where poverty prevented participation. This includes the cost of school uniforms.
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| **Getting home late** | * Some schools arranged activities so they were held in clusters and ended at the same time, making it possible for pupils to attend different activities but share transport home.
* One school even had coaches returning from trips make a detour so that *c*hildren could be dropped off in a certain area (full trips and visits and safeguarding procedures were followed) to foster participation.
 |
| **Lack of awareness of****benefits of extracurricular activities** | * The school which had made the film previously referred to had

included the arrangements for extracurricular activities in thecontent.* It is important to explain to parents the benefit of extracurricular activities and allay any fears they may have. It is also ok to challenge parental views on this in a friendly supportive way.
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| **Access to****technology** | * Schools are increasingly using online technology for

setting homework. Many GRT families may not have access to computers.* Some schools allow pupils to use their computers in twilight and lunchtime sessions.
* One school reported looking at the postcodes of their GRT families and finding the location of the nearest libraries which had free computer use.
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 **The advantages of multi-agency working**

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| **Issues** | **Details and examples** |
| **Barriers to education do not always lie inside school** | * Toothache, poor eyesight and defective hearing hinder

progress.* Addressing health issues can also lead to improved behaviour.
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| **Poverty creates barriers to education** | * Working with other agencies can help remove some barriers connected to poverty.
* Think family workers can help get children into school in

uniform and on time. |

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| **Issues** | **Details and examples** |
| **Schools can learn from and****use other agencies** | * Sometimes someone from another agency has better

communication and engagement with the GRT community and schools can benefit from this. |
| **Role models from GRT communities** | * Where there are GRT heritage workers from other agencies they can act as role models.
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**Adapted using:**

*A Good Practice Guide for improving outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children in education*, The Traveller Movement

*Improving educational outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupil*s, Brian Foster

*Improving education outcomes for pupils from the new Roma communities*, Mark Penfold, EAL Nexus Project

*Moving forward together: Raising Gypsy, Roma and Traveller achievement*, DCSF