

Traveller Education

Welcome:

Very grateful to EC for asking me to participate and chair today's seminar. Last year, I was part of a team which conducted research on children's rights for the NICCY. It was very clear to me that one of the most urgent issues within education, from a children's rights perspective, was educational provision for Traveller children. And that is the key focus of today's seminar... to consider ways of promoting integration and equality of opportunity for the Travelling community in education.

In a moment we will be listening to an overview of the main problems and concerns. Before we do that, it is worth recognising that there have been achievements in the past. For example, the DE was the first Department to have a strategy on Traveller education (in 1993). The Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group on Travellers in 1999 had twelve recommendations for education (more than any other sector). All but one of these recommendations were accepted by DE.... However, since then, I know from the various interviews I conducted last year that there has been considerable frustration amongst Travelling community, the voluntary sector and the statutory sector about the lack of progress in taking these issues forward.

The key problems are well known and widely accepted. What is needed is: more detailed direction as to what needs to be done in practice to resolve these and agreement about who should be taking these actions forward..

NI not alone is facing these issues. Similar search for solutions going on across Europe. Recent research by Jean Pierre Liégeois, who is the Director of the Gypsy Research Centre in Paris, has emphasised the need for both co-ordination and consultation:

"It is piecemeal measures which most often fail; a holistic and comparative approach is thus required.... Co-ordination will foster the expression and mutual complementarity of ideas, methods and authority, towards the attainment of agreed goals. Consultation would help to avoid repetition of failed experiments and perpetual starting over from scratch, with all the accompanying disillusionment.

Co-ordination needed: not just within government agencies but also greater co-operation between the various sectors... particularly the voluntary and statutory sectors. Very heartening, then, that we have such broad representation and indeed such an impressive turnout at the seminar today.

We are going to begin with a short overview of some of the main issues affecting Travellers in education, collated as part of the research the conducted on behalf on the NI Commissioner and Young People,

It will be presented by Siobhan McAlister who was one of the members of the research team who carried out research with children in the Travelling community about their experiences in school. Siobhan is currently working as a researcher for Youth Action.

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