

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Grant gwella addysg: Plant Sipsiwn, Roma a Theithwyr, a phlant o leiafrifoedd ethnig | Education Improvement Grant: Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, and Minority Ethnic Children

EIG 23

Ymateb gan : Cyngor Cydraddoldeb Rhanbarthol Bae Abertawe (SBREC) a Fforwm Sipsiwn a Theithwyr Bae'r Gorllewin

Response from : Swansea Bay Regional Equality Council (SBREC) & Western Bay Gypsy Traveller Forum

This paper is submitted by Gwenda Jones, on behalf of Swansea Bay Regional Equality Council (SBREC), as one of its Trustees and as Chair of Western Bay Gypsy Traveller Forum in an official capacity.

The writer of this paper has many years' experience of working in the field of Traveller Education and with the Gypsy and Traveller communities as a whole. She was previously manager of a Traveller Education service and a founder member of the All Wales Traveller Education Forum hosted by Welsh Government.

- **All of the comments** made here will relate to the impact of amalgamating the Section 488 funding into the EIG and the way in which this was carried out.
- **The following statements** taken from the Welsh Government's Research Report, Gypsy and Traveller Education: Engaging Families- A Research Report (98/2014) indicate ongoing concerns over many years regarding the education of Gypsies and Travellers
-Gypsies and Travellers are considered one of the most marginalised and socially excluded groups in Wales (Estyn, 2011).

In Wales Gypsies and Travellers are the lowest achieving group and in 2011/12 Gypsy Traveller pupils had the highest rates of absenteeism in both Primary and Secondary school (Welsh Government 2013a). This is significant, as high levels of absence and low levels of attainment are linked. Poor levels of attendance

correspond to a distinct set of barriers that Gypsy and Traveller pupils encounter while at school (Welsh Government, 2008a)

When considered in relation to the above statements the amalgamation of the 488 Grant into the EIG, without consultation or the protection of ring-fencing, is particularly concerning.

- ***When the draft budget*** was announced along with the proposal to amalgamate grants, this was not accompanied by any detail regarding the proposed changes or evidence of an impact assessment having been carried out. It was also acknowledged at the time that amalgamation of grants might well have an adverse impact upon certain groups, *including Gypsies and Travellers*, and this has indeed proved to be the case.
- ***Letters of concern*** were sent to various ministers at the time and a reply by Jacqui Sharples on behalf of Huw Lewis AM., then Minister for Education and Skills, stated:

‘The Welsh Government has been clear that the impact of the grant must be to improve educational outcome for all learners and reduce the impact of deprivation on learner outcomes ...by addressing learners’ barriers to learning and improving inclusion... by improving the provision for learners and the engagement of learners. We are currently working with local authorities and regional consortia to develop measurable outcomes which must encompass all learners. This will include those children and young people belonging to recognised groups of learners where under attainment is a significant concern – including the education of Gypsy and Traveller children. Whilst we have not ring-fenced specific amounts within the overall grant, we will continue to be very clear in the terms and conditions of the grant that the needs of these learners must be addressed discretely.’

It is therefore a matter of great concern to learn that the current Minister for Education, addressing the CYPE scrutiny committee, has gone on record as saying that ***she does not intend to evaluate the impact of the EIG.*** She goes on to say that the vast majority of the grant actually goes to deliver

Foundation Phase and continues by saying that 'because we are not dictating to people how they use it...it would be difficult to be able to pinpoint the exact impact'. She further states that the success of the Foundation Phase and success in reaching GCSE targets ultimately demonstrate the success and impact of the programme(EIG).

This would appear to be a very narrow set of criteria against which to measure the impact of the EIG, given the range of areas previously covered by separate grants, and is not at all in keeping with the intentions stated above. It completely fails to address the needs of specific, vulnerable, groups such as Gypsies and Travellers whose additional needs were previously supported by ring fenced grants.

- The reluctance of many Gypsy Traveller parents to allow their children to access secondary education is well documented and understood. However there also needs to be flexible support available in primary schools through provision of a dedicated Traveller Education Service (TES). Many Gypsy Traveller parents are still reluctant to allow their younger children to attend school.

Dedicated TES staff who are well known to the parents and have established a relationship of trust can support those children in school for a period, to provide confidence to the child, the parents and also to the school. Indeed, schools have often been known to demand support from the TES prior to a pupil's admission and especially when admitting Gypsy or Traveller children to their school for the first time.

Whilst the need to improve attainment at secondary school is indisputable, it is vital to continue to provide support at Primary school. TES staff can support pupils and parents in the difficult transition from home to school at Nursery and infant stage, and provide essential support at transition to secondary school, liaising between home and school where necessary and can also provide the school with information regarding Gypsy and Traveller culture.

Without support for engagement in the Primary phase there will be even fewer children attending secondary school and fewer still achieving success at Key Stage 3 and above. The contribution and effectiveness of discrete

TESS has been acknowledged in a variety of Welsh Government publications and reports.

- There was **no consultation** with parents, pupils or professionals prior to this decision being made. In this local authority, anxious Gypsy and Traveller parents first learned of proposed changes when they discovered that longstanding and trusted TES staff had been issued with precautionary notice. Parents then contacted Swansea Bay Regional Equality Council (SBREC) to support them in liaising with the Local Authority regarding their concerns and seeking to establish plans for their children's education in the long term. A few inconclusive meetings have since taken place but the LEA has, as yet, failed to inform us of any decision regarding its plans for a sustainable model for Traveller Education in the future. In the meantime, two out of three highly experienced staff have now left leaving no option for flexible school- based support at primary level.
- The amalgamation of the grants was further shrouded in confusion as it coincided with cuts in Local Authority spending and also with a decision to increasingly delegate funds to schools.
- Delegation of the Gypsy Traveller Support Grant to individual schools does not allow local authorities the flexibility to ensure that funds are directed where they are most needed in the case of this particular group of vulnerable pupils. Gypsy and Traveller communities are not a single homogeneous group and circumstances differ. In some areas of Wales there are long established communities which are settled and well established. Allocation of funds directly to schools in such cases may be well managed. However, some Local Authority areas support groups which may be highly mobile, and often living in unauthorised roadside encampments even within a small geographical area. ***If funds are allocated to identified schools and the children move on, there is no mechanism to allow the money to follow specific children within the boundaries of a Local Authority or to reclaim funding if they leave the area.***

Allocation of ring-fenced funding to support Gypsies and Travellers will enable Local Authorities to develop a mixed model of provision, combining mainstream and specialist support appropriate to the needs of the particular Gypsy and Traveller groups in their localities.

- Failure to ring fence the 488 Grant for Gypsies and Travellers, combined with delegation of funds to schools has, in some instances, led to the demise of discrete, dedicated Traveller Education Services which had been built up over many years. This has resulted in the loss of a huge amount of experience and expertise through loss of staff.
- Earlier Welsh Government publications on Gypsy and Traveller Education, including 'Moving Forward-Gypsy Traveller Education' WAG Circular No:003/2008 and 'Gypsy and Traveller Education: Engaging Families-A Research Report' (98/2014) acknowledge the important role played by discrete TESs. 'Moving Forward' states that ***'Peripatetic staff within dedicated Traveller Education services are likely to play a significant role in supporting access to education for Gypsy and Traveller children and in liaising regularly with families in their homes to build trust and change their negative perceptions of education, whilst respecting the particular culture of Gypsies and Travellers.'***
- TESs also play a vital role in providing continuity when children move to other parts of the country, ensuring school records are passed on and liaising with schools and other TES across the country when children cannot be traced.

In conclusion:

Summary of issues arising from amalgamation of grants into the EIG:

- Lack of consultation with Traveller Education professionals and Children's Rights organisations at the initial stage
- Inadequate Equality Impact Assessment both nationally and locally
- Lack of clarity regarding monitoring and accountability for meeting the needs of specific minority groups. Grant conditions and monitoring were much more specific under Section 488 funding when local authorities had to report annually to WAG on targets set and outcomes achieved with use of the grant.
- Examination success at secondary level cannot be achieved without support for engagement and retention at Primary school.
- Failure to address equality issues regarding a marginalised group in supporting access to education

- Lack of understanding of the specific needs of Gypsy Traveller pupils and their families in relation to education, and the range of strategies which must be employed to engage and retain them in education.
- Failure to consult adequately with people experienced in the field of Traveller Education and to take on board their professional expertise.
- Complete disregard for effects of amalgamation on this group of pupils, and others, as evidenced in the remarks of the Minister for Education
- Section 488 Grant funding is one of the grants which could and should have continued as a distinct grant.