

# **Pavee Point Position Paper on Senior Traveller Training Centres**

*21<sup>st</sup> February 2006*

## **Introduction**

Pavee Point's position on Senior Traveller Training Centres (STTC's) is that they should be phased out over the next 5 years.

Pavee Point understands that such a major change in education policy is bound to create difficulties, challenges and uncertainties for both Travellers and those in teaching and administrative /ancillary positions within the sector.

Pavee Point further acknowledges the role that STTC's have played in the past and the commitment of staff in these centres over many years. Pavee Point contends that staff should be re-deployed to other roles of similar status in the Education system and a redundancy package introduced for those wishing to leave the sector.

Pavee Point also emphasises the need to make these changes on a phased basis- over 5 years to allow for such a significant change to be introduced fairly for both staff and Traveller participants

## **Rationale for Change**

Whatever the original rationale for establishing Traveller Training Centres it is acknowledged by many stakeholders that the approach to Traveller education policy and provision has moved on in recent years.

In particular the overall aim of the forthcoming Traveller Education Strategy (TES) is to ensure that Travellers are integrated into mainstream Education provision across the education system at all levels, including:

- Preschool
- Primary
- Second
- Third and
- Further/adult education levels.

Pavee Point contends that should STTC's be phased out, resources should be ring-fenced and invested in supports for Travellers to be integrated into mainstream schooling and vocational training. A failure to ring-fence funding would severely disadvantage Traveller participation in mainstream provision.

We also acknowledge the need for, and are working to achieve, the introduction of a range of new supports and developments to complement the phasing out of STTC's and to ensure that there are positive outcomes for Travellers from education, training and employment initiatives.

In the current climate of planning for change in Traveller Education, and with the forthcoming publication and roll out of the Traveller Education Strategy (TES) Pavee Point has decided to issue this short statement, clarifying our position on STTC's and highlighting other initiatives we wish to see develop. We feel there is a need to issue this statement so that our position is clear and to avoid misinformation. This position belongs to Pavee Point as a Traveller NGO and not to any one individual.

## **The Traveller Education Strategy**

For over 20 years Pavee Point has worked towards achieving an improvement in the quality of life, living circumstances, status and participation of Travellers in Irish Society. Part of this work has involved advocating for equality of access, participation and outcomes for Travellers in the field of Education.

It is widely known that inequalities exist for Travellers within the mainstream education system and that the education system has failed many Travellers in the past. Through our participation in the joint working group developing the NTES we, along with the other national Traveller organisations, proposed certain actions which would contribute to an improvement in Travellers educational status.

Some of these actions include:

- Traveller culture to be incorporated and embraced within the learning materials and teaching methods
- Educators to receive in-service and pre-service training on anti-racism and interculturalism
- Traveller children would only receive learning support in schools based on need and not identity
- There will be no Traveller-only classes
- Travellers would not be excluded from accessing education in terms of enrolment difficulties
- There should also be positive action measures to support Travellers to become teachers, teacher assistants and other positions in education service provision

The core principles of the TES are integration, inclusion and interculturalism. These are principles to which Pavee Point subscribes and will work to implement over the coming years. These are the principles we believe should inform all future education, training and employment policy and provision.

## **Pavee Point's Position in relation to Senior Traveller Training Centres**

**Traveller-only provision:** The STTC model should it continue to exist will inevitably conflict with the objectives proposed in the TES's objective of working towards integration as is happening in other areas such as Preschools, Primary, Post-primary and Third level.

Internationally, institutionalised segregated provision for minority ethnic groups has been proven to be generally not on a par with what is offered in mainstream provision. For example, the Roma Community have been traditionally placed in segregated education provision leading to a lack of equal education opportunities for the community.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Roma Educational Needs in Ireland. Context and Challenges, City of Dublin VEC in association with Pavee Point and the Roma Support Group 2005.

### **Traveller Education Budget should be Re-Allocated**

Currently an average of €46 million is spent annually on Traveller education about €13 million of which is spent on Traveller Training centres. There is an urgent necessity for a rethink on how this budget is allocated and what outcomes it generates and whether it represents value for money. This money should be ring-fenced and invested in education, training and employment initiatives that will result in positive outcomes for Travellers.

### **Budget Allocation**

Instead of the Department of Education funding parallel services i.e. Traveller- only preschools and Training Centres there is a need to spend that budget on making the mainstream services more in tune with meeting the needs and aspirations of Travellers within a framework that embraces diversity and gives Travellers maximum choice and opportunity for progression.

### **Lack of Outcomes**

Existing research and anecdotal evidence demonstrates that there has been limited progression of Travellers to further education, training and employment from STTC's. Employment levels within the community are very low and the training received by Travellers should contribute to employment opportunities for Travellers.

### **Early School Leaving**

Early School leaving is a common problem within the Traveller community and Travellers educational status is considerably lower than their settled peers. There are many factors that contribute to early school leaving. One of the contributing factors as to why some Travellers are leaving school is that in areas where a Traveller Training Centre exists, the allowance that is offered can act as a draw out of school to Travellers of school-going age. Pavee Point believes that targeted provision should support, not draw Travellers away from mainstream education opportunities.

The National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2001-2003 and 2003-2005 has set key targets for the retention of Traveller students to complete the post-primary senior cycle. Young Travellers should achieve their full potential and in keeping with the target set within the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, be attending integrated mainstream education provision at a level that is appropriate for their age.

### **Possible Next Steps**

A range of strategies are needed to ensure the successful phasing out of STTC's and the mainstreaming of Travellers within the education system. These are based on a number of key principles including:

### **Principles Underpinning the Process**

- The movement towards a mainstreaming approach to Traveller Education and employment training in line with the TES
- The need for targeted strategies within mainstream education and employment to support the participation of Travellers

- A new focus and development of indicators to measure both progression outcomes for Travellers (qualifications, employment, further education and training)
- The budget allocated for Senior Traveller Training Centres should be ring-fenced and spent on measures promoting equality for Travellers in mainstream education and employment
- Employees within Senior Traveller Training Centres could be redeployed within the Education system and redundancy packages introduced for those leaving the education sector.
- Compensation should be provided to those who have additional expense arising from redeployment such as travel or training/education costs

### **Proposed Next Steps**

1. The drawing up a Department of Education and Science strategy paper on the phasing out/mainstreaming of STTC's based on the principles set out in the forthcoming TES
2. The need to consult with a wide range of stakeholders about the implementation of the strategy, including staff and Traveller participants
3. The need for the strategy to identify and cost the additional types of supports that will be needed to support Travellers in mainstream education/training provision
4. The phased closing of STTC's and mainstreaming into local schools/training programmes could be conducted on a pilot basis in a number of areas
5. The development of a career path/redundancy strategy for all staff currently employed within STTC's, including support for further training where appropriate
6. The need to develop further strategies to ensure that Travellers of school going age should be supported in every way possible to complete their formal Education
7. The need for a monitoring/evaluation and research programme to be developed alongside the mainstreaming strategy
8. The development of a Traveller Training and Employment programme consistent with the principles set out in the TES
9. The need for quality Further Education and Training Opportunities for older Traveller women.
10. Strategies to combat early-school leaving among Travellers and providing the necessary supports

11. Targeting Travellers within FAS apprenticeships, BTEI Back to Education Initiatives and VTOS programmes
12. Providing scholarships for Travellers entering third level education
13. Providing a quality youth service which is inclusive of Travellers

### **Conclusion**

It is understandable why many Travellers enter Training Centres as Travellers do experience exclusion and discrimination in the formal education system. It is also understandable that many Travellers may fear a transition into mainstream education and employment and indeed some in mainstream provision may also resist such change out of prejudice towards Travellers.

However, in the current context of real change in terms of achieving better educational status, employment prospects and qualifications for the Traveller Community, the current Traveller specific model should be phased out in favour of a mainstream/targeted approach consistent with the TES and the principles established in the National Action Plan Against Racism (NPAR) under the Provision pillar.