Help your students feel included and supported

It’s important that GRT students feel that they are welcome and truly belong in their school environment from day one.

Here are some simple steps you can take to help them feel this way:

**Recognise and celebrate their heritage:**
Every June since 2008, people across the UK have celebrated Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month. Having your school take part in these celebrations can help your GRT students feel recognised and respected.

The month also marks an important chance for GRT students to address stereotypes and help the wider school community understand their culture.

**Create relevant, recognisable reference points:**
An effective way of embedding GRT culture in your school environment is by curating a selection of GRT books in your library, enabling GRT students to learn about their culture in their school environment.

**Ensure students have a point person to turn to:**
Helping GRT students form an established attachment with an adult in your school ensures they have someone to turn to during difficult moments. This can help empower them to continue with their education when things get tough and avoids students retreating from school and seeking out home as a site of refuge.

**Try to recognise students’ outside responsibilities:**
GRT learners – and especially those further up the school - can be caught between conflicting responsibilities with homework sometimes seen to be getting in the way of duties in the home or family business.

Acknowledging this challenge and helping students find practical ways of meeting both sets of responsibilities builds trust and avoids students feeling penalised or that they have to make a choice.

**Curriculum flexibility:**
Especially as they approach KS4 many GRT learners assume additional responsibilities in their homes or family businesses. Flexing your curriculum to include projects that enable GRT students to express these newly acquired practical and financial skills can help learners grow in confidence and see the relational value of their school work.
Build a relationship of trust and respect with GRT parents

Parents of GRT students play an important role in shaping their child’s attitude towards school, attainment and future prospects. So building a relationship of trust and understanding between the school and GRT parents is a vital step to creating happier, more productive experiences of education at every level.

Here are some steps you can take to build that all-important relationship:

**Parent groups:**
Creating dedicated focus groups helps establish an ongoing, open dialogue between GRT families, teachers and students. It enables you to learn about new ways of engaging GRT students and sends a powerful signal that you are looking for a two-way exchange.

**Inclusion of parents in GRT culture celebration events:**
Encouraging families to be part of any events you hold to celebrate GRT heritage builds trust as GRT parents can see you recognising and supporting GRT students for who they are. Events like these also help challenge common concerns such as ‘my child doesn’t belong here’

**Tailored resources to enhance understanding:**
Many GRT parents will not have experienced higher education, so it’s vital that they have access to resources that help them understand what is involved at each stage of education and how each stage contributes to their child’s future opportunities.

It is also important that any resources are made as accessible as possible. They need to be jargon free, use straightforward language and be made physically available in case internet is not available.

**Open and honest dialogue around exclusions:**
Exclusions and expulsions can be a real flash point and can create distance between schools and GRT families. Involving parents at every stage of a disciplinary process and ensuring that communications are transparent and highlight the rules that have been followed will help reassure parents that processes have been fair and prejudice free.
Empower GRT students to make informed choices

GRT students’ traditionally marginal position outside education and especially post-16 further education has created a lack of knowledge and understanding of further education pathways and of the many alternative forms of higher education.

Ensuring your GRT learners have opportunities to understand and experience their many options is key to them feeling that they could pursue education to a higher level:

**Bring in inspiring role models from their own community:**
This can often be arranged with GRT charity organisations or through universities with GRT students and helps GRT learners see that higher education can be ‘for them’.

It also gives GRT learners the chance to ask questions that they might not feel comfortable asking people from outside their community

**Ongoing liaison with colleges:**
Inviting colleges to your school to hold talks and workshops can help increase students’ knowledge of progression pathways and enable them to explore options in a familiar, comfortable setting

**Site visits:**
Liasing with universities and colleges to set up tailored open day experiences can help GRT students and their families explore settings they might be totally unfamiliar with and can help challenge stereotypes about who further education is ‘for’

**Help students explore the breadth of options available:**
Some GRT students and non-GRT students will be unaware of their full breadth of post-16 options eg. agricultural colleges, self-employment, apprenticeships.

Helping them explore the full range of opportunities open to them will help ensure that they don’t write off ‘post-16’ options altogether before giving them a chance

**Respect for cultural influences:**
A key thing to remember is that not all students (GRT and non-GRT) will want to pursue or be suited to further education. Being alert to, and respecting cultural influences that may impact decisions is just as important as ensuring that GRT learners are aware of all their options
Help challenge stereotypes

Many stereotypes can exist within the school gates around GRT students - even amongst teachers and members of staff. Actively challenging these and creating inclusive environments built on understanding will help your GRT learners feel more of a sense of belonging in their school community:

Create opportunities to learn about GRT heritage:
Use events like GRT History Month to give your GRT students a platform to educate others about their community and heritage. Doing this increases respect and understanding and helps GRT learners feel seen and heard

Challenge unconscious bias:
Pre-assumed lower expectations and outcomes for GRT students by teachers can create a damaging glass ceiling approach to support and negatively impact GRT learners' confidence. Look into options to run Unconscious Bias training for your staff (SLN has free CPD training options available) and stress the need for learning support to be based on individual needs rather than cultural statuses

Encourage connections:
Support opportunities for relationships and connections between GRT and non-GRT students to avoid segregation that can lead to tension between the two groups. Encourage non-GRT students to attend GRT events to support the building of connected circles amongst students

Helpful wider resources

1. **Friends, Families and Travellers** is a leading national Traveller led charity that works to protect the nomadic way of life and to end racism and discrimination against GRT people. Discover more here www.gypsy-traveller.org. The charity's helpline – 01273 234 777 is open from 10am to 4.30pm Mondays to Fridays and you can reach the charity direct at fft@gypsy-traveller.org

2. **Traveller Education Support** – West Sussex County Council’s Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service works with West Sussex schools to support pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly GRT pupils and pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL). Find out more here schools.local-offer.org/team-around-the-school/services-supporting-schools-and-settings-v2/ethnic-minority-and-traveller-achievement-service-emtas/traveller-education-support-offer/, You can also reach the Ethnic Minority Achievement team direct on this email emat@westsussex.org.uk

3. **The Stopping Place** is the only website dedicated to the GRT community in East Sussex and surrounding areas. Check out their resources for young people, parents and professionals here thestoppingplace.eastsussex.gov.uk

4. **The Education People** have a dedicated section of their website dedicated to resources designed to improved outcomes for GRT pupils. Explore their resources here www.theeducationpeople.org/our-expertise/equality-inclusion/gypsy-roma-and-traveller-grt-achievement-and-inclusion/improving-outcomes-for-grt-pupils/

5. **The Traveller Movement** advocates for and works with GRT people to tackle discrimination and promote equality. Read more about GRT access to further education in The Traveller Movements' dedicated resource wp-main.travellermovement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/TTM-GRT-access-to-Further-Education_2021.pdf