Dear Maria,

Thank you for your letter of 2 July.

I am pleased that the Committee is supportive of the cross-government strategy I announced on 6 June. However, we accept that the Committee would like clarification on a number of points and I have addressed these below.

On your first point regarding sharing further details of the strategy with the Committee, we are in the early stages of developing the strategy and I would be happy to hold discussions as this work unfolds in coming months. Our guiding principle will be to ensure we develop policy ideas grounded in the lived experience of the people affected by those policies. It will be of critical importance that we, and other departments, do not assume we understand the needs of GRT communities at the outset, or how best to shape policy to address them without testing our assumptions through engagement with GRT communities and practitioners.

We are putting in place resources in the Department to drive work forward and are planning a programme of engagement over late summer and the autumn, with a view to firming up a draft strategy in the Spring of 2020. I understand you are keen that we set a firm date for publication of the Strategy, but at this stage this can only be indicative and may change as our work progresses. On the request to update the Committee on our progress in 12 months' time, we are happy to agree to this in principle whilst recognising that a sensible timeline for reporting will clearly depend on the timetable for producing our draft strategy.

On the point you raise regarding home-schooling, the Department for Education (DfE) believes that there is no basis at present for increasing local authority powers to inspect or monitor the quality of education provided at home. If local authorities have no evidence that home education is suitable for a particular child, and cannot obtain such evidence, they have wide-ranging powers already to enforce school attendance.

Regarding the recommendation for Government to increase the capacity of community organisations that are working with schools to provide role models from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, DfE does not currently have any plans to fund organisations on this basis. Schools, local authorities and multi academy trusts are best placed to choose the services they purchase in the work they do to support all their pupils, including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. I am very keen that more broadly, the cross-government strategy
includes steps to identify and celebrate notable Gypsy, Roma and Traveller role models as one of its core focuses.

On the request to revisit the recommendation on selective licensing with regard to Roma populations, as noted in the Government’s response, selective licensing is intended to address specific local problems; it is not intended as a response based upon the demography or ethnicity of an area’s population. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) actively encourages local authorities to use all of the tools available to them to address the housing matters they face whoever is affected, including those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. If any community is disproportionately affected by the issues for which selective licensing can be introduced, including high migration, poor property conditions and high levels of deprivation, MHCLG would expect the local authority to consider introducing a scheme to address the problem and for that community to benefit as a result.

Regarding the pupil premium, DfE does not have any immediate plans to change the way in which pupil premium funding allocations to schools are determined, in order to benefit specific pupil groups. The pupil premium is not a personal budget and there is no requirement for schools to spend a set amount on each pupil per annum – so schools are able to draw on their overall pupil premium allocation to support eligible pupils from the point at which they start at the school, even if those pupils will not formally attract pupil premium funding to the school until after the next January school census.

DfE has listened to concerns about the challenges faced by schools when pupils join during the academic year, especially when levels of pupil mobility are high. The national funding formula (NFF) provides local authorities with growth funding to enable them to support schools with high pupil number growth, which the lagged funding system has not yet caught up with. If a school is expecting a significant increase in pupil numbers, they should discuss this with the local authority.

In addition, the NFF includes English as an additional language (EAL) factor, which allocates funding to schools for pupils with EAL who have been in the state-funded education system in England for up to three years.

On your point regarding harmonisation of data collection, the 2011 Census classification does not explicitly identify the Roma group - hence harmonising data collection with the 2011 Census would not provide data about the situation of Roma communities. However, the recommended ethnicity classification for the 2021 Census does include a separate category for Roma. This is the focus for Government work on harmonising ethnicity data collection. The Race Disparity Unit is working with the Office for National Statistics and a number of departments and agencies with a view to moving to the 2021 classification once the Census legislation has been passed.

In addition, the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) is committed to improving data collections across the health service. NHS England is currently reviewing information systems to understand the scope for incorporating protected characteristics within NHS datasets. DHSC looks forward to receiving its report and recommendations in October. Regarding Clinical Commissioning Groups and their need to have due regard for the needs of their Gypsy, Roma and Traveller populations, as the NHS Long Term Plan Implementation Framework makes clear, it is expected that the strategic plans of Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships (STPs) and Integrated Care Systems (ICSs), to be published by the end of the year, should demonstrate the key areas of inequality they will tackle at a local level. These plans should also demonstrate how additional funding is targeted, for example actions that will address the health inequalities experienced by disadvantaged or vulnerable groups such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. STPs and ICSs should also
complete an Equality Impact Assessment for their plans. Clinical Commissioning Groups are assessed against their health inequalities duties by NHS England and we have no plans to change this.

On the point regarding children missing from education, central government does not have powers of audit over local government, who are accountable in their own right including to the communities they serve.

DfE is keen to better understand the effectiveness of the Education (Pupil Registration)(England) Regulations 2006, including how they are working with regards to groups where children missing education is historically a greater issue. The statutory review of the regulations, which is due to report in September this year, will help with this and DfE’s future policy thinking.

Regarding your point on school exclusions, the Timpson Review commissioned new analysis of existing exclusions data, to examine whether individual characteristics—including a young person’s ethnicity are statistically associated with exclusion. Timpson’s report draws upon this analysis and was published alongside the report.

The Timpson Review was also informed by a literature review on disproportionate exclusion and Timpson chaired a roundtable about Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) exclusion. As part of this, Timpson met with representatives from a number of groups representing BAME. Timpson was also advised by a reference group which included representation from organisations representing BAME children. The review makes a number of recommendations aimed at addressing differences in exclusion rates beyond those highlighted in this letter, and the Government response sets out a commitment to reduce disparities in exclusion rates between ethnic groups.

I hope this letter addresses your concerns. We are looking forward to working further with the Committee to develop the new cross-government strategy and remain firmly committed to tackling the serious disparities that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities continue to face.

\[Signature\]

LORD BOURNE OF ABERYSTWYTH