



**Nadhim Zahawi MP**

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families

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Rt. Hon. Maria Miller  
Chair, Women and Equalities Committee  
House of Commons  
Westminster  
London  
SW1A 0AA

24 January 2019

*Dear Maria,*

**WOMEN AND EQUALITIES SELECT COMMITTEE: TACKLING INEQUALITIES  
FACED BY GYPSY, ROMA AND TRAVELLER COMMUNITIES**

Following my appearance before the committee on 9 January 2019, I am writing to you to provide additional information on the following areas.

- The number of local authorities who have taken up a virtual headteacher for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) pupils following the pilot in 2012.
- Eligibility and uptake of the pupil premium in relation to GRT pupils, and the potential to review whether the pupil premium is meeting their needs.
- The Department for Education's commitment to the GRT community.

**Virtual Headteacher for GRT Pupils Pilot**

Following the publication of *Reducing Inequalities for Gypsies and Travellers: Progress Report 2012*, my department funded, between 2012 and 2014, two local authorities to trial a virtual headteacher for GRT pupils, with responsibility for supporting schools to promote better pupil outcomes. The effective practice identified was disseminated to local authorities. In 2017, my Department held a conference for local authority GRT leads to further identify and disseminate effective practice.

Local authorities have a legal duty to ensure that every child in their area, including those who are GRT, receives a suitable education. As I set out at the select committee hearing, local authorities are best placed to decide how to meet this duty for their area. They will approach this in a number of ways, including through building on effective practice, and my department does not collect data as a matter of routine on specific approaches local authorities may take. However, we continue to support identification and sharing of effective practice, and publish performance data on local authorities. We are also providing local authorities with

over £465 million next year to fund the services that they provide to all schools in their local areas, through the Central School Services Block.

## **Pupil Premium**

Pupils attract the pupil premium to their school if they are claiming free school meals or have been registered as claiming free school meals at any point in the past six years. They also attract it if they are in care or have left care through adoption or another court order.

98.6% of the two million pupils currently eligible qualify through current or previous free school meal status. Free school meal eligibility rests on the pupil's household being in receipt of certain means-tested benefits, and on a claim for the free meal being made. We know that free school meal take-up is already strong, we estimate this at 89%, and we know that schools and local authorities have worked hard to encourage applications. For further information on these figures please visit: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupils-not-claiming-free-school-meals-2013>

In the academic year 2017-18, 41.1% of GRT pupils aged 11 claimed free school meals, and so attracted pupil premium to their school - in addition to all those recorded in the previous six years. This is notably higher than the average for all pupils aged 11 (14.7%). For further information on these figures please visit: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/key-stage-2-and-multi-academy-trust-performance-2018-revised>.

Our most recent data for pupils aged 16 (2016-17) show 32.8% of GRT pupils claimed free school meals, and so attracted the pupil premium, together with those formerly registered. This is also well above the national average for all pupils aged 16 (13.1%). For further information on these figures please visit: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/revised-gcse-and-equivalent-results-in-england-2016-to-2017>.

We are aware that some GRT families choose not to participate in the benefits system. In order to better meet their needs, through increased pupil premium funding allocations, they are encouraged to claim the benefits to which they are entitled. We publish guidance and effective practice to help all schools register as many eligible pupils as possible for free school meals. Anecdotally, we understand some families choose not to declare their GRT heritage due to fear of stigma. Therefore, the true proportion of GRT pupils claiming free school meals may be higher than the published figures.

To help school leaders make good choices about the best way to support their disadvantaged pupils, we have published research by the NFER showing the characteristics of successful schools, and funded the Education Endowment Foundation to trial and promote what works best to accelerate progress. We will continue to explore through our engagement with the GRT community, its stakeholder group, and other opportunities such as the findings of this inquiry, whether and how we can further improve the impact of the pupil premium on outcomes for GRT pupils.

## **Commitment to the GRT Community**

As I set out during the select committee hearing, the Government is committed to making this a truly meritocratic country, where everyone has a fair chance to go as far as their hard work will take them, whatever their background and wherever they live. This means we want every single young person to reach their potential, and build a brighter future for themselves and our country.

We recognise that there are particular groups, including from the GRT community that face challenges in achieving the outcomes we seek for all our young people. This is why our education reforms, including those aimed at improving teaching, encouraging good attendance and behaviour, and strengthening the curriculum and examination system, are designed to deliver opportunity and high standards for all pupils, whatever the challenges. This is why new school accountability measures are intended to encourage schools to focus more closely on the attainment of all their pupils.

We know that the key factor that predicts future educational outcomes is low economic circumstances, and that this affects a high proportion of GRT children. We are tackling this issue through the pupil premium, through which we have provided a total of £13.75 billion from April 2011 to March 2018 to help schools improve the progress and attainment of their disadvantaged pupils. We are continuing to provide additional funding, amounting to £2.4 billion this year alone.

We recognise that the GRT community is concerned about bullying and prejudice in schools. Any form of bullying or prejudice is unacceptable, and the Government is working hard to end bullying and poor behaviour in our schools, including that targeted at GRT pupils. All schools are required by law to have a behaviour policy that outlines measures to encourage good behaviour and prevent all forms of bullying amongst pupils. In June 2018, we published research into anti-bullying practices used by schools to prevent and tackle bullying. This included a case study specifically focused on the GRT community. This can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/approaches-to-preventing-and-tackling-bullying>.

We also know that a higher proportion of GRT pupils are excluded from school. In March 2018, the government launched an externally led review of exclusions practice, led by Edward Timpson CBE. The review will consider how schools use exclusion and how this impacts on all pupils, but in particular why some groups of children, such as those from GRT and other ethnic backgrounds, are more likely to be excluded from school. The Government will respond to this review when it is published later this year.

We are also focusing specifically on the GRT community through a number of other initiatives, for example in Opportunity Areas. This includes through our Essential Life Skills programme in Doncaster, which is focused on addressing the challenges faced by pupils from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in engaging with mainstream education. Another example is our £1.7 million investment into careers provision for disadvantaged young people, through the

Careers and Enterprise Fund 2018; GRT young people are one of the three target groups.

Our focus on the GRT community extends to how we compile and publish data. My department is improving data dissemination of outcomes by ethnicity, including for GRT, by working with Cabinet Office on the ethnicity facts and figures website. This will make data available in one place and allow us to draw links between different indicators and datasets. The more we understand through data and evidence, the brighter the light we shine on disparities and the better equipped we are to tackle issues faced by GRT pupils or any other group.

As I said at the Committee on 9 January, we recognise that outcomes for GRT children and young people are currently not where we would like them to be. I believe, and I hope the committee recognises too, that the work we are doing amounts to a cohesive and ambitious strategy to tackle the issues faced by the GRT community.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'N. Zahawi', with a large loop at the end.

**Nadhim Zahawi MP**  
**Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families**