



**The integration of newcomer children
with interrupted education into Northern
Ireland schools**

(A Belfast Based Case Study)

Mary Kerr

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Numbers of newcomer children registered in schools in Northern Ireland have risen year on year, with a 72% increase recorded between 2007 and 2012¹. This has been accompanied by an increase in the range of languages spoken and in the range of prior educational experiences of these children. Primary schools in 2012 recorded a total of 50 languages which were spoken by more than 5 children, 22 languages more than in 2007. For post-primary schools 36 languages were spoken in 2012, an increase of 15 languages since 2007².

Many of the educational and integration needs of newcomer children remain the same in 2014 as were usefully identified in 2007, or indeed in 2009 when the “Supporting Newcomer Pupils” strategy document was developed. Some schools, however, have found themselves facing challenges that are relatively new and relate to the limited formal educational experiences of some groups of newcomer pupils. These pupils have been identified as being mainly – though not exclusively - from the Somali and Roma communities, whose numbers have risen significantly over the last five years. The first record of Somali speakers in the primary sector was in 2008 with 8 pupils registered at schools. This had increased to 42 in 2012 and has continued to rise steeply with one primary school included in this study reporting 50 Somali children on its register this year. Fewer than 5 Somali speakers were registered in the post-primary sector prior to 2012, rising to 16 speakers in the 2012 school census count. Again this number has increased significantly with 19 Somali children recorded on the current register for a single post-primary school included in this study. The first record of Romany speakers in the primary sector was also in 2008 with 11 children registered. This rose to 50 children in 2010 and decreased to 22 in 2012. In the post-primary sector the first recorded Romany speakers were 8 pupils in 2011³. Now however, in just one of the primary schools interviewed for this report, approximately 70 Roma children are currently on the register and 12 attending one of the post primary schools. Concern about numbers of Roma children who are not registered in schools was expressed by a number of stakeholders.

An Education and Skills Working Group was convened by the Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership Board to understand how children and young people who have had severely interrupted experiences of formal education are supported and integrated into the education system in Northern Ireland, and to identify opportunities for any further necessary

¹ www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk > Children Education and Skills > Newcomers

² www.nisra.gov.uk > Demography > Population Statistics > International Stock Migration (2011 – 12)

³ *ibid*

support within existing policies, funding streams and related strategies. The scoping exercise conducted for this paper focused on the experiences of schools supporting increasing numbers of newcomer children who have limited formal education situated within the Belfast Education and Library Board area. These schools have tended to be located in South Belfast, mirroring the settlement patterns of the Roma and Somali communities.

What became clear in the course of the interviews with school principals and staff was that while Roma and Somali pupils constitute the largest groups of newcomer pupils that could be described as having had interrupted formal education experiences, there are newcomers from other countries who would also fall within this definition. Schools cited instances of pupils from a range of countries - Cameroon, China, Hungary, Slovakia – who they have assessed as being educationally behind the expected attainment levels for their age. One school expressed concern at the levels of interruption in the education of those newcomers whose families return to their home countries for extended periods of time, affecting both the child's acquisition of English and his/her academic progression.

All schools interviewed recognised the contribution of the Inclusion and Diversity Service, and found this a particularly useful resource when the experience of having newcomer pupils in their classes was a new one. They also welcomed the ongoing support that the service provides in meeting many of the translation and interpretation needs that are an enormous financial and logistical challenge for schools.

Many interviewees emphasised the benefits of a culturally diverse learning environment for both pupils and teachers. One principal stated that some indigenous Northern Ireland parents had chosen his school specifically because of the diverse pupil intake. However, other parents at the same school had expressed concerns regarding the increasing numbers of newcomers, and others intentionally elected not to send their children to that school for the same reason. In this respect schools are at risk of becoming a victim of their own success at integrating and supporting newcomer children and being identified, in the words of three interviewees as 'the newcomer school'.

The challenges as explained by the interviewees were not simply a function of a pupil's newcomer status but related more specifically to the effects of a limited experience of formal education. This affects literacy and numeracy levels, attainment in other academic subjects, understanding of school norms and in some instances gives rise to concerns around behaviour and attendance. Given that pupils who fall into this category are among the more recent arrivals to Northern Ireland, current newcomer guidelines have not directly addressed these issues.

Schools have therefore developed their own approaches to supporting this group of pupils based on their growing experiences in this area. These approaches, while remaining individual to each school, share many of the same principles. The majority of schools have recognised the need for assessment tools that are additional to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), a set of global benchmarks for language proficiency, currently recommended for assessment and support of newcomer children. All schools interviewed considered that CEFR was beyond the current capability of this group of children and that where it was used they were 'unable to progress beyond the first page'. They stated a need for a tool which assesses literacy and numeracy levels of the child in his/her mother tongue thus helping to build a more complete picture of the child's academic ability.

All schools have dedicated EAL teachers employed by the school who support the children either individually or in small groups outside the mainstream class. The majority of schools have also developed transitional programmes for the children most in need where a small class has been established to provide targeted, mainly literacy, numeracy and ESOL support over a period of time in order to facilitate eventual integration into mainstream classes. In each of these schools pupils in the transition classes also attend mainstream classes for part of the day, thus helping with the integration process, building children's confidence in a classroom setting and helping to establish friendships and grow social skills.

Schools have also, separately, sought to foster closer links with parents and have been innovative in how they have supported families to not only improve their own English language skills but also to better understand school norms and develop the social skills relevant to the cultural environment in Northern Ireland.

However, while parallels exist between practices in schools, interviewees were unanimous in their desire for guidelines and exposure to recognised good practice. More than one expressed it in terms of wanting to know whether they were 'on the right track' and one principal stated that schools such as his were 'crying out for help'.

Parents interviewed for this paper were largely appreciative of the efforts made by schools to integrate their children into the school system. They made particular mention of the home-school liaison initiatives put in place by schools in the primary sector which have improved mutual understanding and enabled strategies to be put in place which have improved children's attendance. However, concerns were expressed about taunts and racist abuse that some of their children had suffered in the post primary sector, although parents acknowledged that as they were unaccustomed to reporting such incidents, the schools may have been unaware of the prevalence of such abuse. A further concern, which was raised by more than one parent, was that their children were not being stretched at school and were in fact being given work that was below their capabilities. They felt that Roma children were sometimes perceived as

one homogeneous group and that not enough attention was paid to the individual strengths of each child.

Recognition is due to the schools interviewed, and others, who have, through their grasp of the issues, their persistency and creativity in developing appropriate support plans, put in place processes which have been instrumental in facilitating the integration of this marginalised group of children into mainstream education. However, with numbers of newcomer children increasing year on year and particularly notable rises in numbers of children with interrupted education, the principals and staff interviewed were worried about increasing pressure on already stretched resources and clear in their desire for a coordinated approach to supporting this group of pupils. They also regard interrupted education as presenting a discrete set of needs which must be reflected in policy and related guidance. Opportunities to address these needs should also be considered within existing education, further education and NEET policies and related funding streams. Best practice exemplars locally and from elsewhere, which will help ensure a holistic and coordinated approach to supporting this cohort of children and young people should be shared and promoted.

1. INTRODUCTION

- **NISMP**

The Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership (NISMP) aims to work across the spheres of government in Northern Ireland and with other key stakeholders to ensure that Northern Ireland is a welcoming place for new migrants. It seeks to support the retention and integration of people in a way that helps meet skills and labour needs to support future economic growth. It provides a regional advisory, developmental and consultative function, enabling our partners and stakeholders to develop an appropriate Northern Ireland migration policy structure. This will help ensure that Northern Ireland's needs and concerns in respect of immigration are recognised within the constraints of UK wide strategy.

- **Background**

Newcomer pupils are identified by the Department of Education as 'a child or young person who has enrolled in a school but who does not have satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum and does not have a language in common with the teacher'⁴.

For a number of newcomer children the challenges of negotiating an unfamiliar school culture through an unfamiliar language are compounded by their limited prior experience of formal education. These children have poor or no literacy in their mother tongue, poor numeracy skills and a resulting lack of academic attainment in other areas of the curriculum. The older the child the greater the disparity with the expected age related attainment.

Commonly referred to as 'interrupted learning', these experiences of education are recognised as affecting a significant number of newcomer children. Children and young people who fall within this group in Northern Ireland have been identified as coming mainly from the Roma and the asylum seeker and refugee communities from the Horn of Africa, primarily Somalia, many of whom have arrived since the development of the DE 'Supporting Newcomer Pupils' policy.

In relation to the asylum seeker and refugee communities, a 2010 Home Office report found that 14% of new refugees had spent no years in formal education, with a further 13% having spent six years or less in education before arriving in the UK⁵. And, with regard to Roma, an EU

⁴ Department of Education (2009), 'Supporting Newcomer Pupils'

⁵ UKBA, Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (2010), *Helping new refugees integrate into the UK: baseline data analysis from the Survey of New Refugees* UKBA Research Report 36

survey across 11 member states found that only 15% of Roma adults complete upper-secondary general or vocational education⁶. A 2005 study into the needs of refugee and asylum seeking children in the UK recognizes similarities between the experiences of Somali and Roma children and links their underachievement to limited access to education pre-arrival in the UK, among other factors⁷.

Concerns for this group of children have been raised at various fora in Northern Ireland, including the Race Equality Forum thematic subgroup on Immigration and at a stakeholder workshop on refugee integration coordinated by NISMP. These issues were further developed at a dedicated roundtable discussion on refugee children and education, held in June 2013 and co-hosted by the Law Centre and the Horn of Africa People's Aid Northern Ireland (HAPANI), a non-governmental organization which supports individuals and families from the Horn of Africa region.

While reference is given to interrupted learning experiences for both Roma and asylum seeker/refugee children within UK policy and strategy documents, there is no further definition of what constitutes an interrupted learning experience. In the US, several states have adopted the terminology 'Students with Interrupted Formal Education' (SIFE) which has, varying according to state, a more detailed definition. In New York, for example, the definition of students categorized as SIFE are those who:

- Come from a home in which a language other than English is spoken and enter a school in the United States after grade 2; and,
- Have had at least two years less schooling than their peers; and,
- Function at least two years below expected grade level in reading and mathematics; and,
- May be preliterate in their native language⁸.

Guidelines developed by the New York State Education Department state that pupils with interrupted education present different educational profiles from other newcomer children or children with special educational needs. They recommend targeted programmes which promote literacy and incorporate social-emotional learning and cultural awareness. For older

⁶ FRA, UNDP (2012), *The Situation of Roma in 11 EU Member State: Survey results at a glance*, European Agency for Fundamental Rights, UNDP

⁷ Hek, R (2005), *The Experiences and Needs of Refugee and Asylum Seeking Children in the UK: A Literature Review*, National Evaluation of the Children's Fund, University of Birmingham

⁸ The University of the State of New York (2011), *Guidelines for Educating Limited English Proficient Students with Interrupted Formal Education*, The New York State Education Department

pupils they note the benefits of vocational training and preparation for entry into the workplace⁹.

- **NISMP Education and Skills Working Group**

Following direction from the NISMP steering group, the NISMP board prioritised an education and skills activity with the aim of “facilitating discussions with statutory partners and stakeholders, exploring opportunities within existing policy documents, programmes and funding mechanisms for education and training initiatives which meet the needs of young refugees and other migrants who have had little or no previous experience of formal education.” This activity supports progress toward the partnership strategic objective 4: “Continue to support partners to better understand their migrant populations and their rights and entitlements.”

It was agreed that a working group of relevant stakeholders should be formed to progress this activity.

Prior to establishing the working group, meetings were held with the Education for Additional Needs Unit of the Department of Education (also represented on the NISMP Board) who agreed to be a ‘critical friend’ to the group through liaison with the group chair.

NISMP Education and Skills Working Group	
Jo Marley (Chair)	Director, Bryson Intercultural
Simon Cunningham	Education Welfare Project Team Coordinator, BELB
Traian Idriceanu	Education Welfare Officer for Roma, BELB
Paul Lawther	Senior Education Officer, Curriculum Advisory and Support Service, BELB
Brian Smart	Head of NEET Strategy and Policy Branch, DEL
Harriet Ferguson	Head of FE Curriculum and Essential Skills, DEL
Maire Thompson	Principal, Malone College
Michele Marken	Former principal, St Joseph’s College
Suleiman Abdulahi	Coordinator, Horn of Africa People’s Aid NI

⁹ ibid

The group was charged with identifying how schools are currently supporting newcomer pupils who have had severely interrupted or no prior experience of formal education, identifying opportunities from within existing policies for further supporting this target group of children and researching how other regions from within the UK and Ireland, and if applicable, from further afield, have approached this issue.

The methodology adopted by the group was as follows:

- Collate the knowledge and experience of the group members and other relevant stakeholders
- Literature searches for evidenced based practice
- A Belfast based study was thought the most achievable outcome given the time and resources available and would in all likelihood reflect experience in other areas.

This group was established as a task and finish group. Any further work will be determined by the NISMP board.

2. STATUTORY SUPPORT FOR NEWCOMER CHILDREN IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Once a newcomer child has been registered in school they are placed in an age appropriate class at which point educational attainment and learning needs are assessed. Newcomer children are recognised as having additional learning needs which require targeted support. The Supporting Newcomer Pupils policy has been developed to help meet the identified needs of these children. The main aim of the policy is to support the language needs of the child to enable him/her to access education via the curriculum. Cultural, pastoral and integration needs are also recognised.

The Inclusion and Diversity Service (IDS) is a regional body, funded by the Department of Education to work with schools in providing support to newcomer children and young people and their families. As well as interpreting and translation services, IDS has developed a Toolkit for Diversity which helps schools to create and sustain a welcoming and inclusive environment for newcomer students and their parents. The service also provides guidance for schools in using the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), a set of global benchmarks for language proficiency, for assessment and support purposes.

Additional support for newcomer children is funded through the Common Funding Scheme (CFS) which allocates an additional 0.5 of the basic age weighted pupil units (AWPU) of funding for each full-time newcomer pupil designated in the school census. Roma pupils are recognized in the CFS as having similar additional needs to Traveller children and generate a further additional allocation of 0.5 of the basic AWPU funding.

Belfast Education and Library Board have a dedicated Education Welfare Officer who provides support to Roma children and young people and their families in registering and maintaining their attendance at school.

3. SITUATION OVERVIEW IN NORTHERN IRELAND

- **Number of Newcomer Children in Northern Ireland with interrupted experiences of education**

The number of newcomer children in schools in Northern Ireland has risen from 5,665 in 2007 to 9,745 in 2012, an increase of 72%¹⁰. Figures collated from the 2013/14 census reveal that 5.7% of the overall primary school population (including nursery units) do not have English or Irish as their first language¹¹.

The number those who speak Somali as a first language in primary schools has risen from 7 in 2008 to 42 in 2012 an increase of 500%.¹² This number has continued to rise steeply with just one primary school included in this study reporting 50 Somali children on its register. Fewer than 5 Somali speakers were registered in the post-primary sector prior to 2012, rising to 16 speakers in the 2012 school census count. Again this number has increased significantly with 19 Somali children recorded on the current register for a single post-primary school included in this study.

Romany speakers in the primary sector more than halved between 2010 and 2012, with 50 registered in 2010 and only 22 in 2012. In the post-primary sector, 8 Romany speakers were registered in 2011 and 9 in 2012. In previous years less than 5 were registered¹³. However, current numbers from the schools interviewed for this paper present a picture of a much larger and rapidly growing Roma school population. One primary school currently has approximately 70 Roma children on its register with 30 children on the register of another school, and 12 attending just one post-primary school. The Educational Welfare Office report difficulties in placing children due to a number of factors: the distance required to travel to school coupled with the fear of racist attacks as well as the failure of some families to attend scheduled interviews at prospective schools.

¹⁰ www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk > Children Education and Skills > Newcomers

¹¹ Hansard, Friday 9 May 2014, *Written Answers to Questions*, Volume 95, No WA2

¹² www.nisra.gov.uk > demography > population statistics > migration statistics > international stock migration

¹³ *ibid*

- **Additional challenges faced by Newcomer Children with interrupted experiences of education**

Newcomer children with a severely interrupted experience of education face a number of additional challenges in accessing and engaging with a formal education system. With expected attainment disparities widening as the child gets older, these challenges gain in complexity in the post-primary sector. Second language acquisition is more difficult after puberty and children who are unable to acquire proficiency in English prior to secondary school will have an impaired ability to access the 'higher order' English that is needed¹⁴. This inability to access the curriculum is also likely to lead to school disaffection and truancy which is correlated with a higher likelihood of future involvement in substance use, youth offending or risk taking behaviour in the community¹⁵.

These challenges can be mitigated or further compounded by a number of factors which include family and school expectations, experience of receiving schools, availability of resources and policy environment. Consequently, these are challenges which must be addressed by all those involved: the child, his/her family, the receiving school community and education institutions.

- **Challenges for Schools and Education Support Services**

Many Somali and Roma families reside within the South Belfast area, the former principally as a result of housing arrangements for asylum seekers and location of associated support networks and the latter as a result of location of community and support networks for Roma. Consequently, and further complicated by the academic selection process in place for post-primary school placement, the demand for places from both the Somali and Roma communities is disproportionately felt by a small number of both primary and secondary schools in the South Belfast area.

School Registration

School registration for children who have low levels of literacy and academic attainment as a result of interrupted experiences of education presents particular problems for the receiving school. While certain schools have developed a level of expertise in supporting these children,

¹⁴ Glasgow ROMA-NeT, *Local Action Plan 2012-13* (accessible at http://urbact.eu/fileadmin/Projects/Roma_Net/documents_media/RomaNetLAP_March13.pdf)

¹⁵ *ibid*

there are resource implications in providing this support. This is particularly in relation to those children who arrive mid-year as funding is currently based on the annual school census taken in October. The school budget will therefore already have been set and schools will consequently have little financial leeway to extend services to new pupils.

The inclusion of newcomer children with interrupted education in school performance tables can skew school results and, as stated through the interviews conducted for this paper, fails to reflect the reality of the considerable progress made by these children during their time at the school.

There are also concerns for schools enrolling Roma pupils who have recognised patterns of poor attendance as this may again skew the results in the annual reporting required from the school and present an inaccurate picture of the school's performance in this area. On the other hand, issues relating to attendance are much fewer in relation to Somali pupils. Two schools noted that the Somali families are generally educationally motivated and keen to register their children at a school and engage with the formal education system. However another school was concerned about the lack of interest displayed by some Somali parents, particularly with regard to learning English which affects how well the child can be supported with their learning at home.

Schools have to work particularly closely and intensively with parents who themselves have had limited experience of formal education and who are consequently less familiar with school norms and the timing of the school day and may be less concerned about regular attendance, or the importance of children transitioning to secondary education.

Initial Assessment

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), a set of global benchmarks for determining language proficiency is recommended for use in schools to assess the EAL support needs for each individual pupil. The level descriptors within the CEFR, however, assume literacy in a person's first language. They were described by school principals and newcomer support staff as being of little relevance for the assessment of children who have little or no written literacy or formal academic attainment.

For Roma children, English will be their third language. Romani language is almost exclusively an oral language and their written literacy in Romanian, their second language, is limited at best. The low levels of written literacy of many Roma and Somali parents further complicate the assessment of these newcomer children.

One EAL support teacher who works with both primary and post-primary schools described the CEFR as unsuitable for non-European languages and completely unsuitable for primary schools. One school which uses only CEFR as an assessment tool, expressed frustration at its limitations, noting that for some newcomer pupils it is completely inappropriate and that the absence of prior educational records, together with an utter lack of knowledge of English make it extremely difficult to assess levels of attainment. Most schools therefore, have developed supplementary assessment tools which they use alongside CEFR where possible, or as one school termed it, as a 'pre-CEFR' assessment. These supplementary assessments carried out on entry to the school, help to build a more complete picture of the child's knowledge and skills in other academic areas and their experience of schooling, thus enabling the school to more accurately identify and address the child's educational needs. These additional assessment tools have been developed on a largely experiential basis, based on a school's increasing knowledge and experience in this area. There was further concern from schools regarding identifying and differentiating between gaps in a child's knowledge or skills which were the result of a language barrier, those which were due to a lack of previous schooling and those which were because of a special educational need. This is a complex area and more than one school expressed the wish for reassurance that they were 'on the right track'. The CEFR therefore has limitations when assessing the support requirements for this group of students and, if not supplemented by further assessment tools, will result in the development of a support programme based on a 'best guess' which may be either inadequate or inappropriate.

At the other end of the school experience, difficulties arise again on how to accurately assess attainment levels of children who are unable to understand the exam questions and give adequate explanation of reasoning, because of their low levels of English rather than because of inadequate subject knowledge.

Engagement in the curriculum

Newcomer children who have had limited prior experience of formal education are unable to engage fully in the classroom. As well as the language and cultural differences, they will be unfamiliar with school norms, lack the skills required for accessing the curriculum and in a number of cases inexperienced in holding a pen or pencil or understanding the conventions of how to write on a page.

While each school interviewed had, through an iterative process of trial, assessment and refinement, developed a programme of integration which was addressing many of the needs of their newcomer children with interrupted experiences of education, there remained challenges relating to increasing numbers of these children; balancing the needs of all children within the

school; coordination of support provided and effective communication with families. Two schools stated that without the additional support that they provide, particularly at the induction stage, there would be equality concerns for everyone in the classroom if a child who doesn't know how to use a pencil and without any form of written literacy or basic numeracy is simply placed in a mainstream class. Funding the required programmes is an ongoing challenge for schools with a continual balance having to be found between funding necessary interpretation and translation costs and funding equally necessary support programmes. One post-primary school commented that due to their resources already being stretched to the maximum, teachers sometimes have to rely on activity packs provided by the learning support team to occupy the children during classes which are above their level of understanding.

Unlike primary schools where the teachers' knowledge of each child's ability over a range of curriculum areas is such that they are better equipped to assess, monitor and differentiate according to need, the experience for post-primary teachers who are with each class for only a part of each day or week, requires more focused attention. This includes awareness raising and skill development among teachers with regard to the challenges faced by the newcomer child with interrupted education and the communication and differentiation required in the classroom.

The successful involvement of the family in supporting both the pupil and the school in addressing the particular obstacles faced by children with interrupted education is critical in determining how well these obstacles are overcome. However, even for families who recognise the importance of education, it continues to prove difficult for them to provide the support that schools require of their parents, due to their own low levels of English and, in many cases, poor literacy and numeracy skills. Nevertheless, some families have shown themselves committed to the task. The Somali community has been singled out by one school principal as particularly motivated in this regard and has set up a proactive parent support group which works to address the educational needs of their children. The group has, for example set up a homework club supported by volunteers.

On the other hand a much weaker engagement from Roma families was noted, resulting in poor attendance from children and many remaining unregistered in a school. Their lack of common language with the teacher, high levels of illiteracy and lack of experience in a formal education environment results in a disengagement with the system, particularly at post-primary level. If present in class they have been described as sitting at the back of the room, keeping their head down and with the class operating around them. Neither the child nor the school have the tools to manage the situation and so communication breaks down and the window of opportunity for engagement disappears. One school noted that attendance of Roma pupils can be as low as a couple of times in a month and frequently averages only one or two days a week,

although they also pointed out that when in school there were no noticeable behavioural problems. The same school also commented that one particular Roma pupil attends only for a course in mechanics which has a strong practical component delivered at a college of further education. This is part of the Post-14 Entitlement Framework which provides a range of curricular opportunities for pupils with an interest in courses where they can learn and apply practical skills. The pattern of attendance noted for this Roma pupil may suggest that there are opportunities for further engagement of newcomer children who have had interruptions in their academic education through the Post 14 Entitlement Framework. It should also be noted however, that a school in the primary sector with experience of working with Traveller children has had demonstrated success in improving attendance among Roma pupils with a number of children achieving attendance rates at close to 100%.

Even those children whose problems are limited in the main to their low levels of English can find themselves penalized in subjects which they understand well, such as Maths, because of their lack of ability to explain their reasoning in English. This creates a problem for the school when end of key stage results are published as it misrepresents the ability of the child.

Home School Liaison

Liaison with parents has proven difficult for many schools with ongoing challenges relating to the communication of expectations around behaviour and school norms. Frequent absences and disruptive behaviour were the two most commonly cited issues and, while schools understood the difficulties and frustrations faced by children which can underpin these problems, they are also concerned about the impact that this has on the learning of all the pupils in the class.

It was also noted that the parents of many children who have had interrupted experiences of education, have themselves very limited literacy and understanding of expectations and aims of a formal schooling environment. As well as hindering communication with families, this also affects the level of home support available to pupils.

One school noted that communication can be difficult even for post-primary children who were born in Northern Ireland if their parents have not yet gained a sufficient level of English. Normal methods of communication, e.g. through notes written in homework diaries or letters sent by the school are ineffective and relying on the child to accurately translate is inappropriate. It may not always be possible to find funding for interpretation or translation services when required, or, in many cases, the requirement is immediate and so securing these services in such a short timeframe is not feasible. However the interpretation and translation

services provided through the Inclusion and Diversity Service were identified as a particularly useful resource by a number of schools and described by one interviewee as ‘brilliant’.

One school suggested that a list of commonly needed phrases that schools may need when situations arise which require immediate action should be compiled in the range of languages represented within Northern Ireland schools and made available on the IDS website.

Transition

Transition from primary to post-primary or from post-primary to further education, training or employment can be a stressful period for any pupil and their family. Schools identified additional challenges in relation to the transition of EAL pupils, such as the completion of the transfer form when moving into post-primary education. This form is completed by the parent, but for parents of EAL pupils who are unsure of how the system is structured or how post-primary schools are accessed, the help of the primary school teacher or principal is vital in ensuring that the form reflects the aspirations and intention of the family. This however requires funding for interpreters and for teacher release time.

There is no obligation on schools to continue to register a child beyond the age of 16. Concerns for EAL school leavers who continue to have low levels of English and limited qualifications were raised by interviewees from the post-primary sector. While support is available for those who wish to pursue a vocational career through initiatives targeted at those identified as NEET or at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), there is no identified provision for those who would like to pursue a more academic route and remain in the formal education system but are prevented from doing so because of their poor English skills. It was also noted that some within the Somali community are additionally hindered from accessing further education if they are still in the asylum system as they are required to pay overseas student fee rates.

- **Challenges for Families**

A focus group meeting with a group of 9 Roma parents and a further interview with a Roma community liaison worker raised the following points regarding experiences of the Roma community with the education system in Northern Ireland.

School Registration

The families represented at the meeting had between them 18 children of school age, all but two of whom were at school. The two children who did not have a school place were aged 15 and 14 and the parents were unable to find a school to take them at this point in the school year.

Help provided by the Education and Welfare Office was useful for families when registering children at school for the first time and the guidance of primary school teachers was useful when the children were transferring to post-primary. The community also supported each other, sharing their own experiences of the school system and giving advice to newly arrived families.

A couple of parents commented that they were not aware that they had a choice of post-primary schools when their children were transitioning from primary school.

Engagement in the curriculum

A number of parents commented that their children were doing well at school and were getting good results. In general parents remarked that the standard of education in schools was high, although a couple of parents noted that their children had been working to a higher level in Romania. In a couple of families the children had complained to the parents that the work they were being given in schools was below the level that they were capable of. For example, one child who could already write was being taught how to form letters. Parents were keen that schools recognised their children as individuals with their own unique set of strengths and weaknesses. They felt that some teachers could show more interest and be more sensitive to the needs and abilities of their children.

Language was seen as the main barrier to full curriculum engagement. Parents were pleased at the level of English language support given in primary schools but noted that there was not a similar level of support in post-primary schools. One parent stated that in his child's school there was no extra English language support provided.

A number of children at post-primary level had complained to their parents about bullying at school and were very unhappy there as a result. Children had been called names, spat at and hit by other children. Parents acknowledged that schools might not be aware of this problem as they had not reported it. They were unaccustomed to reporting such incidents and were also anxious that reporting might lead to the situation getting worse for their children. These comments were echoed by the community liaison worker who cited an incident where a child who did report this to the teacher was not taken seriously.

Parents also remarked that they were unable to support their children with their schoolwork at home. They noted that the children were self motivated and organised themselves with regard to homework. One parent added that in many situations it is the children who help the parents as they have a better level of English.

Expectations and expenses related to full engagement with school life and academic success were an ongoing worry for parents. As well as costs of transport (one parent stated that her children took two buses to school which meant she paid £10 every day on transport), parents also mentioned that school assumptions that children had internet access at home and the pressure to provide children with pocket money so they could better fit in with their peers as additional and ongoing concerns. These concerns were more acute for parents who had children in post-primary schools.

Home-school liaison

Parents thought that the level of focused home-school liaison support provided by primary schools had helped the children integrate into school life and believed that a similar approach in post-primary schools would be beneficial. The community liaison worker concurred that the focus on family liaison developed by some primary schools has helped foster understanding between schools and families and contributed to resolution of issues that might arise through misunderstandings or differing expectations and cultural norms. One example that was given was of St Mary's Primary School which now provides transport for Roma children after hearing from parents about their difficulties in paying for transport or otherwise arranging travel logistics.

Parents remarked that schools mostly communicated with them about their children's poor attendance. They understood the concerns of schools but noted that it was very difficult to force children to attend who were very unhappy at school. Although their children might have left home in the morning to go to school, they didn't always arrive there. The community liaison worker gave examples of parents who were extremely worried about their children's attendance record and who had employed a range of strategies to encourage them to attend.

Misunderstandings relating to cultural norms were also reported as contributing to strained relations between families and schools. The example that was given was of the custom in Romania to send a doctor's note in with the child once the child had resumed school after a period of sickness, whereas in Northern Ireland the custom is to let the school know on the day the child takes sick.

Family ambitions for children

Families wanted their children to go on to have a job after school and for schools to prepare them for this. They were unanimous in their comments that they wanted a better life for their children which included secure employment.

4. MAPPING GOOD PRACTICE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Affected newcomer pupils who could be categorised as having had interrupted education are, in the main, registered in schools within the South Belfast area. For the Somali community this is due principally to housing arrangements for asylum seekers and location of related support networks, and for the Roma community it is mainly as a result of location of community and support networks for Roma. Schools in this area have consequently developed a level of expertise in effectively supporting this target group of newcomer pupils.

- **Good Practice in Post-Primary Schools**

Knockbreda High School

25% of the school's pupils are newcomer children who need EAL support. 18 different countries are currently represented in the school. The newcomer intake has increased significantly over the last few years and numbers are continuing to grow with over 30 newcomer pupils registered since October 2013, the majority of whom require EAL support. Of the EAL pupils in the school approximately 20 could be classified as having had interrupted experiences of education. 5 of these are Somali and 2 are Roma with others coming from Slovakia, Hungary and China.

The school has employed an EAL teacher to meet the demand for additional English language support within the school. This is funded by the Extended Schools Programme and supplemented by the school budget. This teacher was initially employed on a short term contract to provide **intensive EAL tuition** to the children who most required it, but due to the level of demand and the complex nature of some of the pupils' needs, she continues to be employed by the school. She currently provides support to 38 pupils over three days a week. She has an EAL and SEN background and so is able to also provide numeracy support to those children who are behind the expected age related attainment levels in this area. The demand for her services exceeds the capacity of one part-time teacher and as a result her timetable is unable to accommodate some of the recently arrived newcomer children who would benefit from this targeted support.

In addition to securing a dedicated EAL teacher, the school has also created a **transition class for newcomer children who have particularly complex educational needs related to their**

newcomer status and their limited previous experiences of formal education. This class currently supports 8 - 10 pupils at any one time. The children attend the class on a part time basis and are reintegrated into mainstream classes for lessons which have a strong practical component such as science, technology, HE and PE. The transition class teacher supports the subject teacher during these periods. The class aims to fully integrate children into mainstream classes in as short a time frame as possible.

The school has noted that the attendance issues which are often associated with certain groups of newcomer children have decreased since the creation of the transition class along with the post of an **attendance officer** who has been employed to liaise between the parents and the school. Attendance among these pupils was described as having improved dramatically.

Developing links with families and providing relevant support to newcomer families where possible has been identified by Knockbreda as a crucial factor in facilitating a child's integration and improving their attainment levels at school. The school therefore works with the Lagan Village Community Centre on the Ravenhill Road to provide extra English classes for their newcomer pupils and their parents. This also provides opportunities for the school staff to liaise with parents in a familiar, neutral and accessible environment to discuss issues such as cultural norms and school rules which are key to the successful integration of the pupil into school life.

Lagan College

There are 85 students in the school who do not speak English as their first language, 70 of whom do not need extra EAL support. There are 15 who are classified as 'newcomers', who are receiving EAL support.

Of these 15 students, there are 3 Somali students in year 8 who have been identified as having interrupted education. They have all spent at least a year in a NI primary school where they were receiving EAL support. The school has also had other newcomer children who have not been from either the Roma or Somali communities but who have had interruptions in their schooling and consequently are below the expected literacy and numeracy levels for their age group.

Newcomer students are withdrawn 1-2 times a week, or more as appropriate, for one-to-one support with the **part-time EAL tutor**. There is close liaison between the EAL tutor and all members of staff on academic, social and pastoral issues. The EAL tutor sometimes works with the newcomer students in class.

The school provides Key Skills classes in English and Maths for all students who require them and there is close **collaboration between the EAL tutor and the Key Skills tutors** in ensuring that newcomer pupils can access these.

The EAL tutor provides the initial point of contact between parents and the school and usually continues to be the main point of contact if the parents have little English.

The school also operates a volunteering programme for Year 13 which can include mentoring of younger children within the school. Some **older children act as mentors** to newcomer children, providing EAL and other academic support as well as orientation and emotional support.

A **visual timetable** is provided for newcomer children in order to facilitate communication.

Malone College

Malone College is an integrated secondary school in South Belfast. It currently has 79 newcomer pupils on its register, an increase of 147% since 2010/2011 when there were 32 newcomers registered. Somalis are the largest national group represented among the newcomer intake with 19 pupils in the school speaking Somali as their first language.

On registering a newcomer child the school supplements the CEFR assessment with a **first language competency assessment** where this is feasible. Where possible pupils are then allocated a class with others who share the same first language and which has a classroom assistant.

With a significant number of their Somali pupils having interrupted experiences of formal education, the school has challenges relating not only to enabling access to the taught curriculum but also to building the understanding of the pupils and their families with regard to the norms of educational institutions. In response to this the school has opened a **dedicated 'hub area'** for newcomer children which is staffed by a full-time classroom assistant. This area is used to support children in academic, social and cultural learning. It is opened from 8.00am to 4.00pm, thus allowing for experiences in social interaction and development of life skills as well as in academic ability.

The school has researched best practice in supporting newcomer children with interrupted education and, after a field visit to schools in London which have a longer experience in this area, they have now adopted an **accelerated learning programme** which facilitates integration of their refugee pupils into mainstream classes.

Malone College takes a '**wraparound**' approach to supporting its newcomer pupils, understanding that good communication with families is as important as focused classroom and school support for the pupil. The poor language skills and, at times, literacy skills of parents mean that the practical learning support provided by families for their children is not so readily available for asylum seeker or refugee Somali pupils. The school therefore works closely with Somali community representatives to improve home-school communication and provide further academic support for students and, where possible, language support for parents. Together with HAPANI they coordinate a **homework club** for students and are currently looking for funding to resource a **Saturday School** which will focus on language learning and life skills for the whole family.

St Joseph's College

There are 570 pupils enrolled at St Joseph's College of which 138 are newcomers (24%). Of these newcomers, 12 pupils are from the Roma community and 5 are Somali. All could be categorised as having had interrupted education. The newcomer intake in St Joseph's has increased over the last number of years and is continuing to grow.

When a newcomer pupil starts in St Joseph's College an initial meeting is held with the family where a welcome pack is given out and a data capture form is completed to assess among other things the pupil's level of English and prior experiences of education. On the first day at the school the pupil is assessed by a SENCO specialist who works as a Newcomer Support Teacher in the school one day a week. CEFR is used for this assessment to determine the level of English of the pupil. The Newcomer Support Teacher prepares an Initial Assessment Report based on this assessment which is circulated to all staff. Newcomers with interrupted education are often recognised as unable to progress beyond the initial questions on the CEFR assessment. The Newcomer Support Teacher will continue to work with pupils where required, to develop an **Individual Education Plan**.

There is close coordination between all the teachers in the school with regard to the support provided for newcomer children. All teachers have access to the CEFR assessments, assessment reports, IEPs and are aware of the advised in-class support measures.

The school has accessed funding to employ a full time teacher to support newcomer children who require intensive EAL support. There are currently 46 pupils who receive this support. These children are taken out of mainstream classes for a specified number of hours per week for intensive small group support. While the support is offered to any newcomer child with poor understanding of English, all the children who have experienced interrupted education are included in this initiative.

Extended school funding is used to provide **after school ESOL classes** twice a week to pupils who have markedly low levels of English.

St. Josephs also operates a **mentoring programme** where Year 13 and 14 pupils volunteer to support newcomer pupils. These pupils dedicate one free period per week to work along with the Newcomer Support Teacher in intensive EAL support. These pupils also act as mentors and can offer pastoral support if required.

- **Good Practice in Primary Schools**

Botanic Primary

The school has 30 Roma and 4 Somali children on their register of which 12 have been assessed as having had limited or no prior experience of education. Over 23 languages are represented in the school.

The school carries out a comprehensive induction when a newcomer child is registered in order to build up as accurate a profile as possible of the child in terms of their cultural and family background and prior experience of formal education. The CEFR forms part of the assessment but as this tool assumes prior literacy the school has developed their **own assessment processes** which helps build a more complete picture of the child's needs.

The school has an **Induction and Intensive Support Class (IISC)** for the newcomer children who are within the P4 – P7 age group who have had limited or no prior experience of education. This class is currently supporting 12 pupils. The impact of their interrupted educational experiences to date is such that in other circumstances they would be classified as having moderate learning difficulties. In addition to their lack of literacy and numeracy, the children also exhibit behaviour problems connected in part to their lack of understanding of expectation and norms within a school environment. Because of funding constraints the school is only able to operate the IISC programme for two days a week.

In addition to IISC, the school has **Survival Language Classes** for the weakest newcomer children who are too young for the IISC programme, i.e. those pupils in the P1 – P3 age group. These classes give one to one support for the child. Within current funding limits they are able to operate these classes on Friday mornings.

The EAL and the SEN staff work closely together to support newcomer children who have additional literacy and numeracy needs.

The school has also linked up with Newtownbreda High School with relevant staff from each school visiting the partner establishment so that support offered post primary can be less interrupted and more tailored to the child.

Fane Street Primary

The school has 235 children on the register of whom 52% are classed as newcomer. 50 of these newcomer children are Somali, the significant majority of whom arrive having never previously attended a school and with no written literacy in their home language. Some children may even be unfamiliar with how to hold a pencil. The number of Somali pupils has risen 'dramatically' in the last few years. These children are spread over all classes within the school. Eighteen different first languages are represented in the school.

The school has identified that interrupted education can affect other groups of newcomer children other than those from the Somali community. For example, some Eastern European children have been taken out of school for significant lengths of time if their family has had to relocate temporarily to their home country. This impacts on the continuity of learning for the child and also slows down or undoes progress made in English language acquisition.

Through a process of trial and error and evaluation, the school implements a comprehensive programme of support for its newcomer children who have had limited previous schooling:

- In Primary 1, and 2, **classes are kept deliberately small** so that the teacher can provide more individualised support to newcomer children with the help of a dedicated classroom assistant.
- Primary 3 and 4 newcomer children who have low levels of literacy are withdrawn from their class for part of the day to work with a teacher who has been employed on a part time basis to **provide intensive literacy instruction**. A classroom assistant is also employed to provide similar support within the class for numeracy.
- For Primary 7 children the school operates a two step programme for newcomer children who have had previous interruptions to their education. Step 1 lasts for approximately 6 weeks, during which the child will attend a **teacher led induction programme** in the morning, with afternoons spent integrated back into their class. During the induction programme the child is taught fine motor skills such as how to hold a pencil, basic numeracy concepts and pre-reading and pre-writing skills. They are also equipped with the necessary 'survival vocabulary'. This programme is tailored to the needs of each child and the child is moved to Step 2 of the programme in as short a time

frame as possible. During Step 2 the child is withdrawn for literacy support for 1 ½ hours each day with additional numeracy support provided within the classroom.

This support package provided by the school for each of its year groups is carefully coordinated so that children are withdrawn for literacy support during the general literacy time for the class. This allows the newcomer children who are withdrawn to participate and enjoy the other curricular subjects with the rest of their class.

A **parent liaison worker is employed** by the school to facilitate communication with any of the parents, whether native English speakers or not.

The school monitors the progress of its newcomer children carefully to ensure that the programme that they have put in place is effectively helping to build literacy and numeracy skills as well as English language acquisition. Some of the children who arrive in the school in September with no English or prior schooling were able to achieve Level 3 by June. Other newcomer pupils who have been in Fane Street for a number of years leave working at level 5.

The most recent inspection report for the school (published 28th March 2014) notes that about half of the newcomer children have had no experience of any prior schooling in their home country and notes further that this trend looks set to continue. The report goes on to describe the progress made by some of the newcomer children as 'outstanding'.

St Mary's Primary School

St Mary's has an intake of 139 pupils of which approximately 50% are from the Roma community. There have been Roma pupils at the school for approximately five years but the numbers have increased significantly in the last year.

The school has a large population of children from the Traveller community and so teachers are experienced in assessing children who have had interruptions in their education. Teachers identify the individual needs of the children in their class and develop IEPs to support and track progress.

By **providing transport** both to and from the school for pupils who require it, the school has made considerable progress in improving attendance among Roma pupils. The school recognised that transport costs and frequent changes of address present difficulties for some Roma families in ensuring the regular school attendance of their children. The provision of a dedicated bus for pupils had originally proven effective in improving attendance among Traveller children. The school emphasises the importance of attendance to families and rigorously follows up every case of non-attendance. It has developed a system of **attendance**

cards for parents who have low levels of written literacy, whereby the parent will sign and tick the reason for the absence. Good attendance is celebrated in assemblies where certificates are awarded to those whose attendance has noticeably improved. As a result of this range of initiatives, some Roma children now have close to 100% attendance rates.

The school works closely with the Education and Welfare office to keep contact details updated and will **text information to parents** as mobile phones have been identified as the most reliable means of communication.

Every child has the use of an iPad while at school. As well as being used to help build language skills among Roma pupils, they have also contributed to a more sustained engagement of pupils in curriculum work through enabling a range of presentation styles accessible to pupils of all abilities. Pupils are also allowed to prepare iPad presentations in their home language, thus keeping the focus on the curriculum area being studied as well as explicitly demonstrating to the class an appreciation for each pupil's culture.

The large numbers of Roma pupils in the school has meant that children are picking up English less quickly than previously. More time is now dedicated to the overt teaching of English with **pupils withdrawn from class for language support**. The school also recognised the need for a Roma or Romanian speaking teacher. A qualified Romanian teacher is now funded by the school to work as a **Roma support classroom assistant**.

These measures have contributed to the positive relationships that the school has with Roma families. A number of **Roma parents now volunteer at the school** and there is a high turnout of Roma parents at parent/carer curriculum days.

- **Good Practice from the Voluntary and Community Sector**

Bryson Intercultural

The Roma Education Programme, coordinated by Bryson Intercultural, provides school preparation activities to children from 4 to 10 years of age. Activities take place at a location in South Belfast which is convenient to many among the Roma community, with flexible opening hours. Activities focus on preparing and supporting the child for the experience of school as well as on the curriculum and include:

- How school works and school routines
- How to use school resources

- Working with the teacher/classroom assistant
- Working with peers
- How to use playtime
- Basic literacy and numeracy work.

Early Years services are also provided through this programme to Roma families with young children aged 0-3. A key focus of these services is building the relationship between the child and parent/grandparent and to simultaneously build mutual confidence and self esteem.

The work of Bryson in the area of education has contributed to Roma children progressing in mainstream education as well as reducing the need for the intervention of social services child safeguarding teams.

Horn of Africa Association in Northern Ireland (HAPANI)

The Horn of Africa People's Aid Northern Ireland (HAPANI) supports people from Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, the Republic of Sudan and South Sudan. HAPANI run a homework club for children to support them in improving their literacy and maths skills. This club has to date supported 47 children and is facilitated by volunteers.

HAPANI has also successfully collaborated with St Mary's University College whereby three students from the college undertook a 6-week placement to provide English language support for young people and adults from Horn of Africa communities. This proved a beneficial experience for both the learners and the St Mary's students.

5. NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

- **Scotland**

Glasgow Roma-NeT Action Plan 2012 -13¹⁶

Glasgow is part of **Roma-NeT**, a transnational partnership of ten European Cities committed to improving the social inclusion and community integration of the Roma population living in their cities. The Glasgow Roma-Net action plan contributes to progress towards EU expectations regarding Roma integration (see Appendix 1). Good practice highlighted within the action plan includes:

- Shawlands Academy:
 - **Linking education and employment together** into a positive destinations pathways programme for disaffected Roma young people.
 - In discussions with EUROCITIES with regard to a **Cities of Origin project** to help schools create better links with educators and schools in the towns, villages and cities where Roma children and families have migrated from.
- Glasgow City Council:
 - Two **Slovakian home link staff** are employed across the Shawlands and Holycross learning community. The staff are shared across the nursery, primary and secondary sectors.
- West of Scotland Regional Equality Council:
 - Provided **interpreting services and regular information updates for 3 Slovak Roma parents who had already joined the Parent Council** at Annette Primary school last year, thus helping Roma people to engage better with schools.
 - Established **homework clubs** in local schools with a high intake of Roma pupils.
- Strathclyde University and Glasgow City Council education service carrying out **research**: “Children on the margins: Roma migrant children’s experiences of schooling and other services”.

Mapping the Roma Community in Scotland

In the 2012 assessment of the UK National Roma Integration Strategy, the European Commission noted a lack of baseline data and monitoring of impact of the national strategy. In response to this, and also in recognition of the recommendation that every member state seeking to access future EU Structural Funds should have Roma Inclusion priorities in their

¹⁶ Accessible at http://urbact.eu/fileadmin/Projects/Roma_Net/documents_media/RomaNetLAP_March13.pdf

Partnership Agreement, Glasgow City Council carried out a mapping exercise of the Roma community in Scotland¹⁷.

This mapping exercise provides an evidence base to build an understanding of the numbers, the localities and the needs of the Roma population living in Scotland. The aim is to ensure that the European Commission's Roma inclusion objectives are applied in Scotland and that the Scottish Government has a robust evidence base.

- **England**

In 2011 just 12% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils achieved five or more good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, compared with 58.2% of all pupils¹⁸. A Ministerial Working Group on tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers was set up to look at how this might be addressed. Education commitments outlined within their progress report in April 2012 include:

- **Highlighting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils as a vulnerable group**, ensuring that school inspections will pay particular attention to their progress, attainment and attendance.
- The Department for Education to **publish case studies** from some of the higher performing primary and secondary schools for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils to be shared with schools, local authorities and education professionals around the country.

Some local education authorities in England have included support for young people with interrupted education within their guidance relating to newcomer children. In Brent council, for example, arriving students are given a language and skills assessment, with **access classes and induction programmes** available where necessary to help the pupils catch up to the expected age-related attainment, with the aim of eventual integration into mainstream classes¹⁹. Brent and Camden councils also **track the achievement of Somali students as a specific ethnic group**, rather than as part of a broader African group²⁰. This helps to clarify the nature and scope of the problem and develop appropriate solutions.

In Hampshire County Council there is particular recognition of the needs of older newcomer children, with **guidance developed for the 14-19 age group**. This includes an induction period

¹⁷ Accessible at www.scotland.gov.uk/resource/0043/00434972.pdf

¹⁸ DCLG (2012), *Progress report by the ministerial working group on tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers*

¹⁹ *ibid*

²⁰ Rasmussen, J, (2009), *Education for Somali Students in London: Challenges and Strategies*, Foundation for International Education

where necessary during which support is tailored as far as possible to the educational experience and career aspirations of the child²¹.

In Battersea and Wandsworth the Love to Learn project was established to support young people and families from refugee backgrounds to access educational advice, advocacy and opportunities²². Services include organization of **homework clubs, ESOL for Education workshops with parents** and coordination of a number of **volunteer learning mentors**.

- **Ireland**

The City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb) manages a service for Separated Children Seeking Asylum (unaccompanied minors)²³. Services provided include a refugee access programme, a **transition programme** for separated children and other young people from refugee backgrounds. This intensive programme focuses on three core subjects – ESOL, Mathematics and Life Skills - and aims to equip the young people with the skills necessary to access and engage with the mainstream curriculum and to engage more fully in Irish society. It offers ongoing enrolment so that new students can join at any time during the year.

- **United States**

The New York State Education Department has developed **guidelines** particularly for the education of newcomer children with interrupted formal education²⁴. These recognise the lack of school readiness skills, sociolinguistic proficiencies, cultural competencies and expected academic knowledge. They also recognise that the increased pressure at secondary school level to attain educational benchmarks increases the risk of these students dropping out. The guidelines advocate **diagnostic tests in the home language** of the child as well as in English in order to better determine the impact of interrupted education on their academic knowledge. A **Personalized Learning Plan (PLP)** is developed which can include **vocational opportunities, family literacy training** and **socio-emotional and cultural goals** as well as **teaching strategies** and **short and long term academic goals**.

²¹ Hampshire Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service (April 2008), *14-19 Guidance for Young Bilingual People, their Families and School and College Staff*, Hampshire County Council

²² www.love-to-learn.org.uk

²³ www.separatedchildrenservice.ie

²⁴ The University of the State of New York (2011), *Guidelines for Educating Limited English Proficient Students with Interrupted Formal Education*, The New York State Education Department

6. MAPPING OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER SUPPORT IN NORTHERN IRELAND POLICY AND FUNDING STREAMS

- **Post-14 Entitlement Framework**

The [Post-14 Entitlement Framework](#) became statutory on 1st September 2013. It provides for a curriculum which is more balanced between general and applied courses, i.e. those which are academic and those which have a more vocational focus. It also provides a range of essential skills courses to support those children who are at particular risk of becoming NEET.

This new framework presents a clear opportunity for our target group of newcomer children, offering as it does a wide and more balanced range of courses that are relevant to their needs, aptitudes, interests and their future job prospects.

The Post-14 Entitlement Framework encourages schools to collaborate within their learning communities to provide the widest possible range of courses for their pupils. The creative use of these learning communities in areas in which there are a number of Roma, Somali or other children with similar needs could help in the effective delivery of identified courses to this group.

- **NEETS Strategy: Pathways to Success**

The [Pathways to Success](#) strategy joins up actions being taken across the Executive to prevent young people falling into the NEET category in the first place with further measures to re-engage those who have left school but are not in any other form of education, training or employment. The strategy considers three groups of young people: those under 16 who are at risk of becoming NEET; those aged 16-18 and those aged 18 to 24. In the first two categories there are obvious overlaps of remit with that of the DE and indeed the strategy makes clear that the two departments (DEL and DE) are developing a document to describe how they will implement their respective policies and programmes in a coherent manner.

A number of measures outlined in the strategy could be considered in relation to addressing the needs of our target group of newcomer children:

- The Community Family Support Programme focuses on the needs of the most disadvantaged families, to enable young people to re-engage with education, training or employment.
 - A means tested allowance is available (up to £30 per week) to incentivize participation at school or college post 16; (this is currently under review with the intention of targeting support where it will make the most impact on meeting need and encouraging participation).
 - The Training for Success Programme offers a guaranteed training place for every 16-17 year old who is NEET; individuals on this scheme receive a weekly allowance plus travel, subsistence and child care support where appropriate. Essential skills qualifications are embedded across all TfS provision.
 - An Innovation Fund is being developed to test new approaches based on sound evidence.
- **Traveller Child in Education Action Framework**

The Department of Education recognises that there are similarities between the needs of Traveller children and those from the Roma community and has consequently allocated funding to schools to meet these needs. This is additional to the funding allocation for newcomer children.

In August 2010 the Department issued a revised circular on the [Education of Children and Young People from the Traveller Community](#). Many of the principles and guidelines contained within this circular echo the approaches and proposals put forward by stakeholders involved in the production of this report. There are opportunities, therefore, in tracking the progress made through the Regional TESS Delivery Plan (Feb14) and in building similar initiatives for Roma children. Particular mention is made of interrupted learning and the need for some schools to 'develop special transition programmes' for Traveller children who 'need to reintegrate into school after a period of absence' with recognition that this may require a separate programme of study for a limited period of time. This principle has been identified as being of importance for other groups of children, such as Roma and Somali who may also have suffered interrupted learning.

- **Delivering Social Change Signature Programme: Education**

Delivering Social Change is a framework that seeks to co-ordinate key actions across Government Departments to take forward work on priority social policy areas. The Signature Programmes were set up to improve literacy and numeracy levels, offer increased family support and to support job creation within local communities - all of which were identified as being key priorities.

The [Delivering Social Change Education signature programme](#) aims to improve literacy and numeracy attainment levels in primary and post-primary schools through the provision of additional teaching support. 233 recent teacher graduates who are not currently in work are being employed to deliver tuition in primary and post-primary schools to children who are struggling with English and Maths.

While newcomer children and young people were not an identified target group for this programme, if the model is successful, it may be useful to extend it to meet the particular needs of newcomer children with limited prior experience of education.

- **Extended Schools**

The Extended Schools (ES) programme aims to improve levels of educational achievement and the longer term life chances of disadvantaged children and young people by providing the necessary additional support which can enable those children to reach their full potential.

The Department of Education notes in its [Supporting Newcomer Pupils policy document](#) that some schools have used this Extended Schools funding to support newcomer pupils and gives the example of St Eugene's High School in the WELB offering additional ESOL classes to students.

This approach may be appropriate for other schools. The focus of the programme on supporting the families and communities of disadvantaged pupils means that it may also be used to address low levels of family literacy that exists within some families of our target group of children. A key feature of Extended Schools policy has been to encourage schools to cluster together to offer programmes that are beneficial for the local community. Schools choosing to work in a cluster receive a standard additional 15% funding on top of their core allocation.

- **Careers Advice and Guidance**

Preparing for Success, a joint all-age [Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance Strategy](#) delivered by the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning, aims to develop more effective career decision-makers, leading to increased and appropriate participation in education, training and employment.

This service is currently being jointly reviewed by DEL and DE. This presents an opportunity to identify how this service might be better delivered to our target group of young people.

- **Provision of free classes in ESOL for Asylum Seekers and their Dependents**

Approximately £2.4M is funded by DEL through the FE system for ESOL provision. ESOL is free to all those seeking asylum and their dependents. Although it is not free to refugees, the charges for this group in colleges (£40 - £60) are small relative to private providers. Asylum seekers and their dependents who are given refugee status while attending an FE course in ESOL are able to finish the course free of charge.

- **Collaboration and Innovation Fund**

The Collaboration and Innovation Fund supports the implementation of the 'Pathways to Success' strategy for young people who are not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). Provision through the fund promotes a range of flexible strategies to support the most disadvantaged young people identified as NEET into work.

- **European Social Fund**

The overall strategic aim of the European Social Fund in Northern Ireland is to reduce economic activity and increase workforce skills. The Programme has two interrelated priorities. Priority 1: Helping People into Sustainable Employment focuses on improving the employability of those groups experiencing significant employment gaps. Priority 2: Improving Workforce Skills focuses on improving the qualifications and skills of workers without essential skills and low or no qualifications.

- **United Youth Programme**

As part of Together Building a United Community strategy, the United Youth programme will create up to 10,000 one year placements for young people in the NEETS category; offering structured employment, work experience, volunteer and leisure opportunities, along with a dedicated programme designed to foster good relations and a shared future. With reports of racist hate crime becoming increasingly frequent, it seems particularly important that this programme with its dual focus on those identified as NEET and on the promotion of good relations, is inclusive of our target group of young people.

7. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Newcomer children are defined in policy as a 'child or young person who has enrolled in a school but who does not have the satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum and does not have a language in common with the teacher'. The increasing numbers of newcomer children in Northern Ireland schools who have educational needs relating to their limited prior experience of formal education in addition to poor understanding of English, prompted the NISMP board to convene a scoping exercise on how these children are currently integrated into our schools and whether opportunities existed within current policies, funding streams and related strategies for further support.

Children who fall within the category of having educational needs due to interrupted experiences of formal education are mainly – though not exclusively – from the Somali and Roma communities. Numbers of these two groups of children in schools have risen dramatically in the last few years. Just one primary school interviewed for this study reported 50 Somali children on its register, a stark contrast to the 42 recorded throughout the whole of Northern Ireland in the 2012 school census. Similarly, 70 Roma speaking children are registered at another of the primary schools interviewed where only 22 were recorded across all schools in 2012.

School interviewees felt undoubted pressures in relation to providing adequate support for newcomer children with interrupted education. In the first instance they were challenged as to how best to determine the nature and scope of the support required. Current assessment tools which assume a level of literacy and numeracy commensurate with a child's age or which have been designed to diagnose a special educational need are of little relevance in the assessment of children who are achieving below the expected level for their age due to limited formal education. Resourcing and providing the required support while also facilitating the integration of the child into mainstream classes presents the next challenge for schools. This integration into school life, as for any child new to the school, will be greatly facilitated if there is open communication between the school and family and a shared understanding of expectations and respective responsibilities. However, for newcomer children with interrupted education, this communication is not only hindered through language difficulties but can be further exacerbated by differing sets of expectations stemming in part from the parents' own limited experiences of formal education.

These challenges are magnified in the primary schools we spoke to, by the sheer numbers of newcomer pupils on their register, and by the significant percentage of these who could be

considered as having had interrupted prior experiences of education. For schools in the post-primary sector additional concerns related to the extent of the interruptions in education and the larger disparity with expected age-related attainment. This disparity has implications both for the nature of the support provided at an age when children are beginning to put in place the building blocks for future careers, as well as for the perceived reputation of schools which is closely related to examination outcome data.

School interviewees were unanimous in their desire for guidelines and exposure to recognised good practice. More than one expressed it in terms of wanting to know whether they were 'on the right track' and one principal stated that schools such as his were 'crying out for help'.

Parent interviewees were largely appreciative of the efforts made by schools to integrate their children into the school system. They recognised that different cultural norms often led to misunderstandings between schools and parents and they welcomed the home-school liaison initiatives put in place by some schools which helped to address these misunderstandings and facilitate communication. They further recognised that their own circumstances meant that they couldn't always meet the expectations around either the expenses or the homework support required which would help their children to fully engage and benefit from what the school had to offer. Worryingly, they also expressed concerns about racist abuse that some of their children had suffered at post-primary schools, although they acknowledged that as they were unaccustomed to reporting such incidents, the schools may have been unaware of the prevalence of such abuse. Families' main expectation of education was that schools prepared their children for employment and that the support made available helped their child to fully meet his/her potential in achieving this.

It is clear that there is a wealth of good practice and innovation existing in Northern Ireland that has evolved out of the cumulative knowledge and practice of schools which have experience of supporting pupils with limited prior education. It is also clear that the notable increase in the number of such pupils, together with pressures on already stretched resources, require an equally innovative approach from within government departments and statutory agencies in relation to policy development and implementation. While the newcomer policy and related guidance is of most immediate relevance, opportunities for developing resource-sensitive and relevant solutions to the challenges posed by interrupted education exist in other areas, in particular the policies and funding streams related to priority social policy areas. Opening up these opportunities and capturing the learning from best practice exemplars both locally and from elsewhere, will help ensure a holistic and coordinated approach to supporting these young people in forging a productive life in Northern Ireland.

Recommendations:

- The intent of the Department of Education (DE) to review the Supporting Newcomer Pupils strategy is welcomed; it is proposed that the review take account of the emerging patterns of migration and its consistent incremental growth and in particular the needs of newcomer pupils who have had interrupted experiences of formal education.
- Specialist School or Centre of Excellence status should be awarded to schools with an acknowledged expertise in supporting and integrating newcomer children and which are prepared to share and disseminate this practice with other schools.
- Urgent consideration should be given by the Department of Education to an alternative method of capturing and reporting the examination performance of schools educating high percentages of newcomer pupils with interrupted experiences of formal education.
- The Inclusion and Diversity Service comes highly recommended. Consideration to expanding its role should be given by the Department to include direct support to schools wishing to develop strategies and personalised learning plans for newcomer pupils with interrupted experiences of formal education.
- Guidelines for the integration of newcomer pupils who have had interrupted experiences of formal education should be produced, to be disseminated as a Circular by the Department.
- Education and Library Boards should be resourced and supported by DE to develop and implement strategies which facilitate relations between schools and hard to reach communities.
- School cluster groups should be resourced and supported by DE through Education and Library Boards to develop and implement strategies which facilitate access to the post 14 entitlement curriculum, ESOL support and promote cultural understanding for pupils with interrupted experiences of education and their families.
- Special focus should be given to the education and training development needs of newcomer children and young people with interrupted experiences of formal education within inter-departmental, inter-sectoral initiatives such as: Collaboration and Innovation Fund; Pathways to Success; United Youth Programme; Delivering Social Change, all of which have flexibility suitable to this target group.
 - The existing Pathways to Success NEET Advisory group which includes representation from Departments and the voluntary and community sector is a readymade vehicle to facilitate and monitor progress within these initiatives.

APPENDIX 1: EU COMMUNICATIONS TO MEMBER STATES ON ROMA INTEGRATION

Situation Overview

- Millions of Roma across Europe are severely disadvantaged by low levels of literacy and poor quality or incomplete education. Across Europe, Roma have significantly lower enrolment and completion rates in primary education.
- In the new EU member states Roma children often suffer segregation in schools due to a number of factors: regional or housing segregation between ethnic groups; inappropriate or culturally biased testing leading to the placement of many Roma children in special schools; private or faith schools that impose extra requirements such as tuition fees²⁵.
- EC report 'The Situation of Roma in 11 Member States' findings:
 - (i) nine out of ten Roma children aged 7 to 15 are reported to be in school;
 - (ii) participation in education drops considerably after compulsory school age; and
 - (iii) only 15% of young Roma adults complete upper-secondary general or vocational education²⁶.

EU response to Roma marginalisation

- **Strasbourg declaration on Roma (Oct 2010)**

Member states agree to a joint effort and pan-European response to meet the needs of the estimated 12 million Roma living in Europe.

- **On 5 April 2011, The Commission adopted a Communication creating an EU Framework for National Roma Integration strategies up to 2020.**

Its aim is to encourage Member States to adopt further a comprehensive approach to Roma integration. They are asked to set realistic and achievable national goals for Roma integration in four crucial areas (employment, education, housing and health) and to allocate sufficient

²⁵ Farkas, L (2007), *Segregation of Roma Children in Education: Addressing Structural Discrimination through the Race Equality Directive*, European Commission

²⁶ FRA, UNDP (2012), *The Situation of Roma in 11 EU Member State: Survey results at a glance*, European Agency for Fundamental Rights, UNDP

funding to actions supporting Roma integration from national budgets complemented by international or EU funding.

- **National Roma Integration Strategy assessment by the European Commission (2012)**

Gaps identified in UK strategies in relation to education were:

- A lifelong learning approach, with a focus on early childhood education (reference only made by England) and vocational training would have been relevant.
- An identification of quantifiable targets and budget allocation would be needed.

Gaps in the general implementation of the strategy include:

- Involvement of civil society and Roma at local level
- Monitoring and evaluation, including: mapping the situation of the Roma; monitoring the results and impacts of the national strategy; planned regular reporting and evaluation
- Raising awareness (including in public administrations)

- **April 2013 Guidance on Ex-Ante Conditionalities**

The most recent EU guidance on ex-ante conditionalities for European Structural and Investment (ESI) funds sets out the thematic ex-ante conditionalities that apply, including a condition referring to Roma Inclusion (A10-2). It allows for ESF and ERDF investment in 'integration of marginalised Roma communities' and the ex-ante conditionality is that a national Roma inclusion strategic policy framework is in place.

The most recent information about EU Structural Funds implies that every Member State should have Roma Inclusion priorities in their Partnership Agreement.