Building Trust, Stepping Together

An evaluation of the online education work of Open Doors Education & Training with Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Communities

Centre for Race, Education & Decoloniality

Jon Tan, Nicole Whitworth & Vini Lander

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LEEDS BECKETT UNIVERSITY

Open Doors Education & Training
Unlocking the potential in young people

Acknowledgements

The Centre for Race, Education and Decoloniality, within the Carnegie School of Education at Leeds Beckett University, holds precious the principle of furthering knowledge through dialogue. Making sense of the world, past, present and future should be an act of collaboration. Where certain voices are obscured, silenced, collaboration through dialogue is our activism.

This report is a result of professional, respectful and honest conversations. We thank all staff at Open Doors Education and Training, and at the Traveller Movement for their part in these conversations. To all tutors, we say thank you for your ongoing support of those children, young people and families that have found a safe, productive space in the 'Tutors for GRT' programme, and for helping devise creative means of telling the communities' stories. Most of all, we thank the children, young people, families and communities that helped tell ODET's story and gave us an insight into their experiences of learning and schools. We know we have learned from you. We hope we have helped – *Jon, Nicole & Vini at CRED*

"At Open Doors Education and Training (ODET) we were delighted to deliver a second round of our Tutors for GRT programme which was generously supported and funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Thank you to the Centre for Race, Education and Decoloniality at Leeds Beckett University for crafting this insightful report and for your support throughout. From the outset CRED's ethos and human-rights focus aligned with that of Open Doors'. Our sincere thanks to the dedicated parents and guardians, and to the passionate tutors and schools who participated in the programme. Thanks also to our colleagues at The Traveller Movement. Most importantly thank you to our students for your commitment and motivation, and for your comments and feedback. Children's rights are at the centre of our work, including their right to be heard and our student's voices can be seen throughout this document. We hope to continue to provide the Tutors for GRT service

and to continue to unlock the potential in young people. The value of the programme is evident" – *Hannah Culkin ODET Programme Manager*

Thank you

Introduction

Welcome

At the start of 2022, the Centre for Race, Education & Decoloniality (CRED) at Leeds Beckett University was commissioned to take a look at the work that Open Doors Education & Training (ODET) have been doing with children and young people of ethnic minority Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities, namely, Irish Traveller, Romany Gypsy and Roma.

Beginning in response to the concerns about children and young people's education being impacted upon by the Covid-19 pandemic, ODET began an online tutoring programme. This provided one-to-one online personal tutoring for students from these communities, now finding themselves unable to attend their schools under lockdown restrictions. In its first year it had reached 120 students from over 116 primary and secondary schools. Some of these students were referred to the programme from local councils or from non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Some students found out about the service through word of mouth and became involved through their own or family initiative.

In 2021 a partnership with the Traveller Movement, ODET and King's College London conducted a first-year evaluation of the online tutoring programme and concluded that *'real change can be delivered with investment and expertise' (ODET, 2021, p49).* Perhaps most importantly, the report gave a sense of a longer-term impact on those children and young people who had been involved.

IMPACT

'Tutors for GRT young people' was borne out of need during COVID19, but it will have an impact on the young people enrolled that will outlast the pandemic.

…this evaluation has shown that online one-to-one tutoring with professional tutors is equally accessible for the three ethnicities targeted, across age groups, educational stages and gender'

With a second year underway, we at CRED wanted to return to the programme with two simple purposes: first to see if the positive experiences of ODET's work continued and, second, to find a way to give a voice to the students and their communities so they themselves could tell us about their experiences of this approach to learning, and perhaps of others. We were ready to listen.

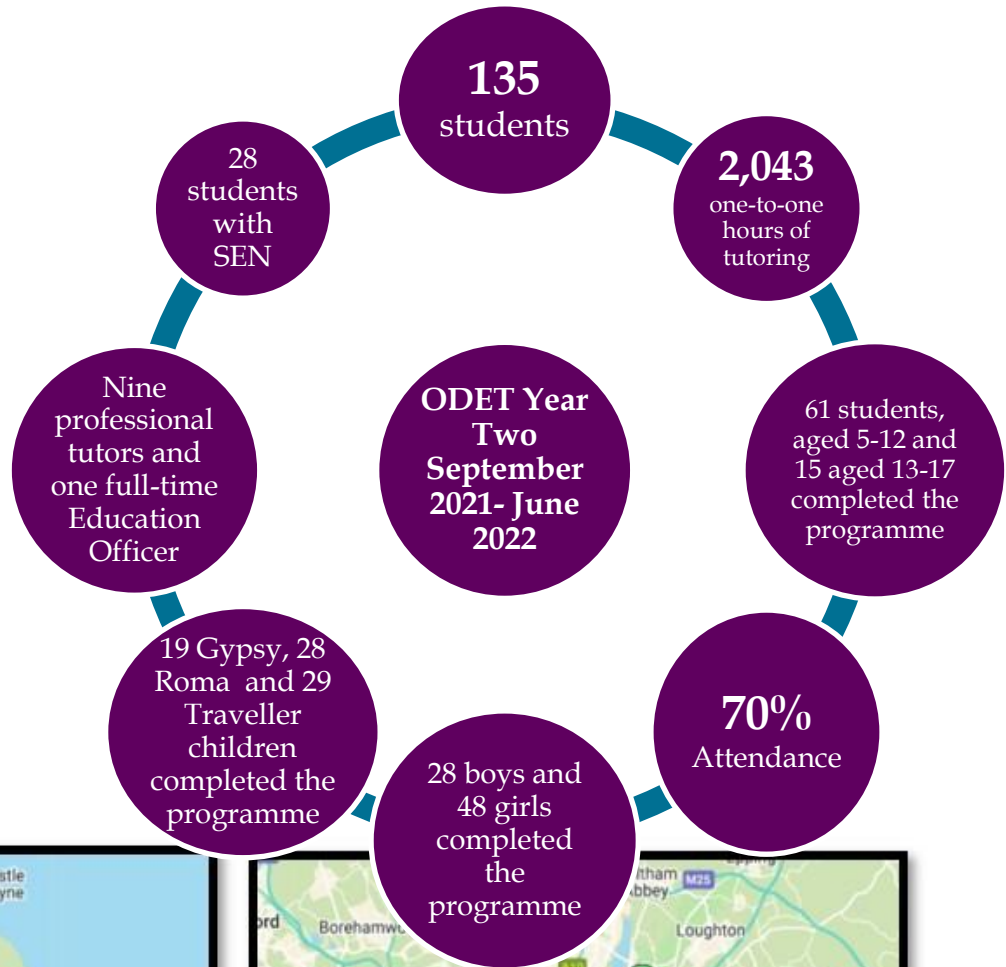In the following report, we want to tell you the story of ODET's ongoing work with their communities and to help you hear their words. We will revisit some of the indicators that show the programme's achievements in this second year. Yet, most importantly, we want to show you what we've learned from listening to the students and their parents. Before we get into the detail, let's have a summary.

Executive Summary

- Open Doors Education & Training's (ODET) 'Tutors for GRT' programme provides high quality, professional tutoring for children and young people of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities. In its second year it has successfully supported GRT students from across the UK, increasing its reach on its first year.

- Contrary to past deficit narratives the students show very high commitments to learning, ones that are sustained over the year and that are evidenced in their reported gains in confidence and skills.

- Tutor ratings show that 85% of students make progress at the expected level or above and that their effort and commitment is above the expected level in 91% of cases.

- Students and their families report on real improvements in their learning and skills whilst with the programme, most importantly in terms of how working with ODET's tutors improves their ability to engage and make progress with their learning in school.

- ODET's services are an essential bridge between home and school, a key component in improving the learning and engagement of GRT students. Their one-to-one tuition has the capacity to address longstanding and intergenerational barriers to achievement, experienced by the communities.

- The programme has an important impact on student confidence that is central to them making progress, engaging with and achieving at school, now and in the future.

- As an alternative and personalised approach to learning, 'Tutors for GRT' is highly respected by the communities. Their valuing of learning came through very strongly in all their responses and, in contrast to school experiences, ODET's programme provides a safe, motivating and productive space for students.

- Researching *with* communities, and learning from them, requires the adoption of more creative and participatory approaches. Through the sharing and storying of

these lived experiences, researchers should work to be facilitators of a community's voice. Empowering, active and authentic.

135 students

2,043 one-to-one hours of tutoring

28 students with SEN

Nine professional tutors and one full-time Education Officer

ODET Year Two September 2021- June 2022

61 students, aged 5-12 and 15 aged 13-17 completed the programme

19 Gypsy, 28 Roma and 29 Traveller children completed the programme

28 boys and 48 girls completed the programme

70% Attendance

Student Locations
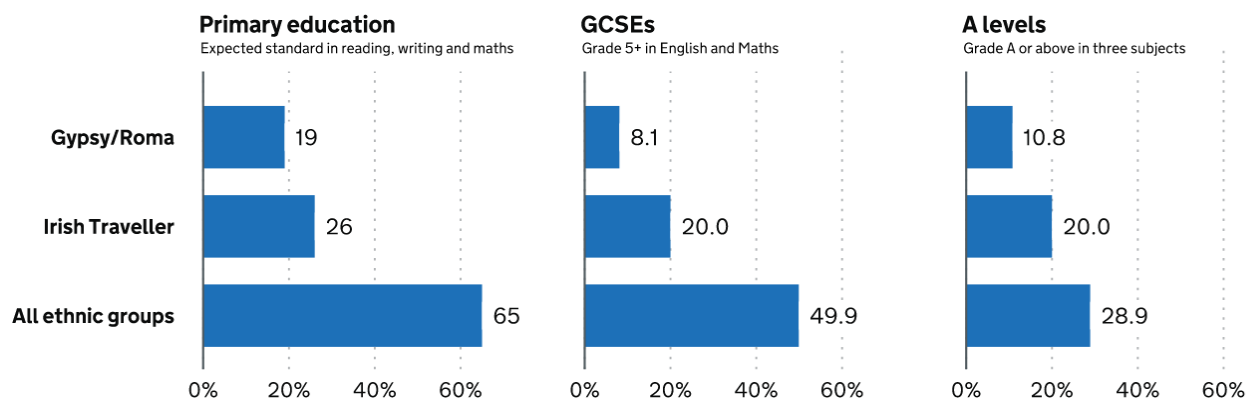
...a little bit of background to the story

Introduction

To make sense of what ODET is achieving with its online tutoring programme, it is worth saying something about the organization itself, its purpose and approach. Part of its purpose is also in response, not only to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on learning, but also the challenges that have faced children, young people and their families in getting good outcomes from education. It's also interesting to see what governments have said about educational provision, what their expectations have been in terms of schools supporting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities. We also have to talk about COVID-19 and its incredible impact on learning since March 2020.

Communities 'Hard to reach' and Disengaged?:

The concerns about the educational attainment and engagement of GRT communities from official sources is longstanding. In terms of achievement, children and young people of Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller heritage have some of the lowest educational outcomes, across all periods of formal education. The chart below is provided by the Department for Education (DfE, 2022), using national data for the UK.

Educational attainment among Gypsy, Roma, Irish Traveller and pupils from all ethnic groups

	Primary education Expected standard in reading, writing and maths	GCSEs Grade 5+ in English and Maths	A levels Grade A or above in three subjects
Gypsy/Roma	19	8.1	10.8
Irish Traveller	26	20.0	20.0
All ethnic groups	65	49.9	28.9

Alongside data on attainment, meeting expected grades and moving to a further stage of education, there is also significant worry about the levels of suspensions, permanent

exclusions and absences from mainstream, state schools. Recent information from the Department for Education (DfE, 2022), shows that students from GRT communities were the most likely of all ethnicities to be suspended, excluded or absent from school. Just taking a snapshot of the autumn term 2020-2021 as an example, the DfE (2022) reported that:

> '*In the autumn term of the 2020 to 2021 school year, 52.6% of Gypsy or Roma pupils, and 56.7% of Irish Traveller pupils were persistently absent from school. Pupils from these ethnic groups had the highest rates of overall absence and persistent absence.*'
> Source: Department for Education (DfE, 2022)

These patterns of what might be called educational underachievement and disengagement are not new. Indeed, when the Conservative government under Boris Johnson announced a new package of funding to address these concerns, it relied much on government-funded research by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) reporting on these same issues more than a decade ago (see Wilkin, Derrington and Foster, 2009). Research from governments has attempted to identify key areas for concern that may contribute to the low levels of achievement, successful transfer and retention. Most notably here, such research has recognised systemic problems such as a lack of co-ordinated support at points of transition between primary and secondary schooling; the need for consistent messages about expectations and aspirations across school professionals and parents alike; and the need for greater work to be done in building professional cultural knowledge in developing inclusive practices in schools (Rossiter, 2010; Bhopal & Myers, 2009; Traveller Movement, 2019).

In all honesty, it is a familiar language. A mixture of systemic, bureaucratic challenges that need address; a need for professional services to work better together; coupled with the sense that communities lack aspirations and have different commitments where education is concerned. As Perry & Francis (2010) noted in their analysis of governmental approaches to tackling underachievement of children from poorer

communities, raising aspirations was important but it cannot be the pre-occupation of policy without other fundamental changes.

So, when we seek out wider research understanding of the barriers to success for GRT communities, the picture is complex and unsettling. In the Traveller Movement's three-year examination of community experiences (Traveller Movement, 2019) the following key issues stand out:

- Bureaucracy and digital exclusion impact significantly on school admissions, transfers and more general engagement with schools. Coupled with parents' own, often traumatic experiences of school, such issues can affect access to learning, continuity in engagement and the development of a productive home-school relationship.
- Instances of discrimination and experiences of racism are commonplace for students and their families. Examples of this are found where exclusions from school are often a first resort, rather than a last; where incidents of racism and racially motivated bullying are rarely dealt with appropriately; and where there is a lack of recognition of GRT communities as ethnicities.
- Intersections of race, SEND and socio-economic factors such as poverty/ financial hardship create complexities that many schools lack either the resources and/or the understanding to develop effective strategies for support.

The issues summarised here resonate through earlier research into the experiences of GRT students, their families and communities. Similar experiences and institutional barriers were found in Gould's (2017, p127) work, where she noted '*the inflexibility of school admissions processes',* and the '*opposition to school attendance of GRT pupils from non-GRT parents'.* Gould (2017), like many other authors, also draw attention to the ways in which the culture and curriculum of many schools perhaps fail to recognise and, thus,

be inclusive of GRT traditions and experiences of the world. More concerning still has been the continuation of racialised stereotypes of the communities (Myers & Bhopal, 2009) and the lack of real knowledge and understanding being incorporated into initial teacher education (Crozier, Davies & Szymanski, 2009).

Looking back at what research tells us about the school experiences of GRT students and their communities, what seems clear is that any understanding of their (dis)engagement with education and its impact upon achievement, needs to be balanced with a recognition of unintended institutional barriers and the constancy of racism. At CRED and ODET we reject the shorthand labels of 'hard to reach', 'disinterested' and 'disengaged' that tag certain families and communities as problematic. Yet, while discriminatory experiences of education for GRT communities have been present throughout history, other developing circumstances towards the end of 2019 and extending through to the present day, have amplified such challenges and concerns.

The Pandemic, School Lockdowns & Learning from Home:

When the world recoiled from the spread of the Covid-19 virus the winter of 2019/20, no-one could have predicted its catastrophic and far-reaching effects. At the time of writing, the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2022) summaries make for difficult reading. Worldwide, there have been 606,459,140 confirmed cases and some 6,495,110 deaths. In The United Kingdom alone, from 3rd January 2020 to 13th September 2022, there have been 23,554,971 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 189,026 deaths (WHO, 2022, summary for UK).

Its impact has not been evenly spread and it is now well documented that greater effects in terms of health, education, financial hardship and well-being have been felt by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, by those experiencing poverty, by those in living and employment conditions where social distancing has been more difficult (Lander, Holloman & Tan, 2021). As governments attempted to control the spread of

the virus, measures to limit public interaction (lockdowns), including closures of schools and the moving to online services, such actions have brought into focus a poverty of digital access, as well as a more obvious impact on mental health. There are echoes here of the bureaucratic missed steps and barriers reported by the Traveller Movement (2019) and Rossiter (2010), where policy has made assumptions about the capacity of *all* families to engage seamlessly with the movement towards online provision. Having the resources to learn from home, physical and otherwise, is not a universal given.

At the same time as the pandemic's impact in organisational and operational terms, we have to recognise the significant rise in the report of racial violence and harassment against individuals and communities. As Tan (2022) has written, such racism has grown considerably in terms of acts committed against Chinese and Asian communities, but it has been mirrored by a general rise of the Right and the 'othering' of all communities, positioned as '*strangers'* (Myers & Bhopal, 2009).

As we move into further challenges within the UK, as inflation rises and the cost of living crisis deepens, many of the longer-term impacts of the pandemic continue to present difficult circumstances for recovery. For communities such as those of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage, many of these factors are deep-seated, historical and present-day lived experiences. So, in terms of children and young people's learning, what might positive steps towards recovery look like?

Open Doors Education & Training:

The concerns we have outlined above are central to understanding how Open Doors Education & Training (ODET) has stepped into the picture. Born out of an insightful appraisal of the developing education crisis brought about by the pandemic, ODET was set up in 2020. In partnership with its sister organisation, The Traveller Movement, ODET is a Community Interest Company.

Following school closures and the challenges faced in learning from home, separated from professional educators, The Traveller Movement saw an opportunity to reach children and young people through digital methods. In the first phase of its work, its online tutoring services focused specifically on the GRT communities, fully appreciating that difficulties in accessing learning would be disproportionately felt by these children and young people. Given the historically poor experiences of many of the communities, it would be important to provide access to professional tutors to support learning from home. With the set up of ODET, first came the 'Tutors for GRT' programme that '*strives to ensure that young people from ethnic minority backgrounds do not fall behind their peers'*, (ODET, 2022). It is this programme that this report focuses upon.

Before we move on to tell you about how we approached the task of gaining an understanding of what ODET's programme has achieved, it's worthy to note the principled, human-rights based approach that sits at the heart of the ODET/ Traveller Movement's activities. Whilst this makes clear the need for education to be provided for all, as an equal right, most importantly it also makes explicit commitment to the recognition of a child's culture and national values and to their expression of these characteristics through education. Here are the specific aspects of the Universal Declaration of Children's Rights that ODET draw attention to in justifying their work:

Article 28 – Education

Recognises the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity.

Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child.

Article 29 – Aims of Education
The development of respect for the child's parents, their own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from their own.

Article 30 – Children of Minorites or indigenous peoples
A child belonging to a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right to enjoy their own culture.

Source: ODET (2022)

The details of the Tutors for GRT programme have been described in the earlier, year one report (ODET, 2021), but it is useful to provide some quick facts about it here. Then we can tell you a bit about ourselves at CRED and how we approached learning about the programme's activities and gaining an insight of its achievements, as seen through community eyes.

Tutors for Gypsy, Roma and Travellers Project

Quick facts

Age range: 5-18

Time commitment: 1 hour per week for 39 weeks (to cover school terms)

Equipment: Resource pack provided including books and stationery. Tablet and Wi-Fi dongle offered if needed. All free of charge.

What is it?

We match up the young person aged 5-18 with a professional online tutor. All of our tutors are trained and DBS checked. This project is a complement, not an alternative, to mainstream schooling. Students log on to our easy-to-use online platform and we offer one hour of additional support per week to work on any aspect of education the child would like more assistance with. This project is free and all technology and resources are provided.

Ways of Listening – Our Approach

About us: The Centre for Race, Education & Decoloniality (CRED)

At CRED, our academic and professional research enables us to understand the experiences of people of colour, including children, young people, teachers, education leaders and community groups. Through our research we seek to inform education policy change, to decolonise and transform curricula to reflect the contributions and experiences of people of colour, nationally and internationally - in order to prepare all to live, learn and work in a racially and ethnically diverse world.

The centre seeks to work in partnership with education professionals in all sectors from early years through to further education. To develop teachers and practitioners to become race equality education activists/advocates - challenging racism in all its forms and developing anti-racist practices. To decolonise[1] the curriculum and develop colleagues' knowledge and understanding of race and racism in education. We also work with teachers, children and young people to develop teaching resources to tackle racism in schools and society.

We work with international partners to undertake research to advance knowledge and understanding of race and racism, improving professional practice to enhance the educational experience of BAME children and young people, affirming their racial and ethnic identities and engender a secure sense of belonging.

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[1] To decolonise is to challenge the dominance of a western, Eurocentric account of the world, its past, its consensus of established knowledge, its history of peoplehood. It is not a destructive act that replaces one *understanding* with another, but instead seeks to rebalance through a recognition and re-valuing of those voices and lived experiences silenced, subordinated and made invisible by established power.

Ways of Seeing and Listening:

Research has a language of its own. It's a complex set of ideas, communicated with complex and unfamiliar vocabulary. When we at CRED were asked to take a look at what ODET did, and to give our thoughts on whether or not the second year of its work had been successful, we were conscious of the trust ODET were placing in us – just in asking. To invite someone new into your professional space is an act of trust, perhaps like inviting someone you don't know into your home, where things are precious.

We were also aware that the communities themselves might be nervous about a university coming in and asking questions. After all, as we know, many families had poor experiences of education and its professionals, and of dealing with professionals more generally.

We were also conscious that ODET was a small, busy organisation, with an important commitment to the communities it served. In developing a view of their work, assessing their possible achievements, we wanted to do so without interrupting the *real work*, the day-to-day effort that was directly supporting tutors, children and families.

Our approach then, is to use research as a platform for hearing and understanding the views of those we work with; to value participation and dialogue in research; and to

find more creative means of engaging with working professionals and the communities they serve. These participatory approaches are founded in principles of equality, empowerment and valuing the expertise born of a lived experience. So, to build our picture of ODET's work we relied on two main data gathering activities:

- Looking at ODET's own in-house data that they routinely collected as part of their own monitoring of recruitment and satisfaction levels.
- Working with the team to adapt a meaningful learning activity for children and young people that engaged them creatively, continued to provide an opportunity to practice their skills, and, at the same time, enabled them to communicate their experiences of education and online learning. As part of this, students produced a wide range of work, from poems to drawings, pieces of creative writing about learning. Some also became researchers into their parents' experiences of education.

In this way, we as members of the CRED team of researchers hoped to minimise our potential disruption of day-to-day business, particularly anything that might be a distraction for the work of the tutors and their students. We attempted to do principled, ethically-considered research, without getting in the way!

In building our picture, making our interpretation of the various artefacts of ODET's work and students' experiences of the programme, we have treated each item of information as a contributing piece of a jigsaw. Each is interesting in its own right, but together they give us a real sense of the work going on. To use a little of that research vocabulary, the students' work produced in the learning activity has been analysed using a narrative inquiry approach, trying to preserve a sense of the whole piece (an 'artefact') and how it contributes to a bigger understanding. This approach has been used to interpret all of the 'qualitative' information we had. Alongside this, we reviewed ODET's routine monitoring data, subjecting its more 'quantitative' data to standardised processes applied to descriptive statistical work.

In other words, we used our knowledge and skills as researchers to build an understanding of the ODET 'Tutors for GRT' programme and, most importantly, to listen to and learn from what children, young people and families had said about education and online learning. In the following stories, we hope that we represent those voices with honesty and that we do so in trusted and respectful ways.

All of the voices displayed in the following chapters are from students aged between eight and fifteen, from boys and girls, from the range of communities. We do not give this detail for specific extracts of what they said, partly to preserve their anonymity and partly to show how these were commonly lived experiences across all who took part.

Key Findings – A Second Year

Year Two – From Recruitment to completion: The demographic picture:

In 2021-2022, 135 students signed up to the programme which ran from Sep 2021 to June 2022. Ninety-three percent were living in houses, seven percent were on sites, with none being nomadic; Twenty-eight students had either a formally recognised (statemented) or suspected Special Educational Needs (SEN). Of those students who signed up, ninety percent (n=121)[2] started the programme. Of those that started, sixty-three percent (n=76) completed it. Table 1 shows the absolute numbers of the students who signed up and participated in the programme in 2021-2022 by ethnicity, gender, and age.

Table 1: Students signed up to the 'Tutors for GRT' programme in 2021-2022.

2021-2022		Signed-Up	Non-Starters	Starters	Discontinued	Completed
Gender	*Boys*	57	6	51	23	28
	Girls	78	8	70	22	48
Ethnicity	*Gypsy*	23	2	21	2	19
	Roma	44	3	41	13	28
	Traveller	68	9	59	30	29
Age	*5-8*	40	5	35	9	26
	9-12	60	6	54	19	35
	13-17	35	3	32	17	15
TOTAL		**135**	**14**	**121**	**45**	**76**

Table 2: Students signed up to the 'Tutors for GRT' programme in 2020-2021.

2020-2021		Signed-Up	Non-Starter	Starters	Discontinued	Completed
Gender	*Boys*	63	7	56	25	31
	Girls	57	2	55	20	35
Ethnicity	*Gypsy*	29	5	24	16	8
	Roma	57	4	53	15	38
	Traveller	34	0	34	14	20
Age	*Primary*	88	8	80	30	50
	Secondary	24	1	27	12	15
	Tertiary	4	0	4	3	1
TOTAL		**120**	**9**	**111**	**45**	**66**

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[2] Note: As a standard format, we show percentages here, with the actual number *n* given in brackets.

For comparison the corresponding data for the 2020-2021 is included. Note that the age data categories are somewhat different for year 2. The number of students who participated in the programme, i.e., those who attended at least one session, increased by 9% from the first year (2020-2021) to the most recent year (2021-2022). There was some indication of a slightly higher proportion of students completing the programme in the second year (+4%)[3].

Over 2021-22, the available data shows that ODET has been able to maintain and extend its recruitment overall. Whilst there have been slight changes in the demographic make up of those supported by their work, the 'Tutors for GRT' have again achieved successful numbers of completions, with increases on its first year. Patterns of non-completion follow a familiar trend, with those in secondary phases of school encountering more challenges. However, the numbers of children of primary age that complete the programme continues to be encouraging and, arguably, a hopeful indicator of key skill foundations being laid and confidence being built.

Year Two – Attendance

In the second year of its programme, ODET's 'Tutors for GRT' was able to secure a high level of attendance.
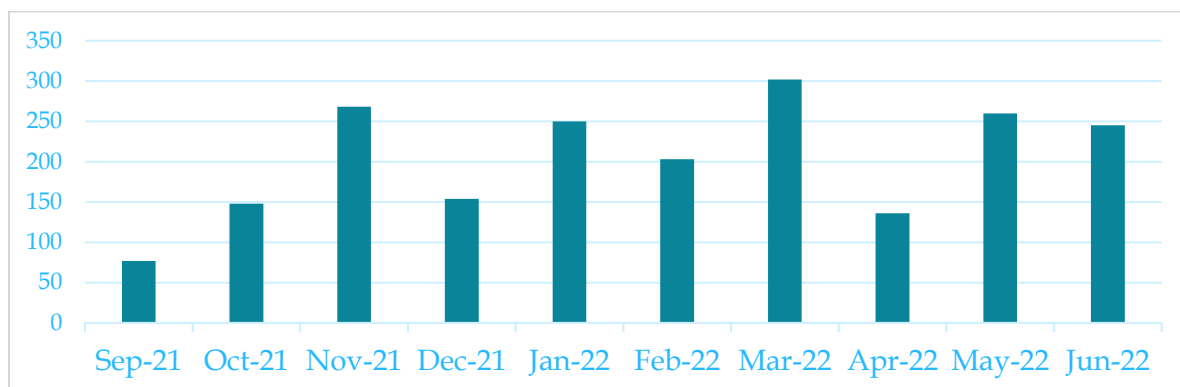

Figure 1: Breakdown of number of lessons by month.

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[3] This difference was not statistically significant. Using a one-tailed Z-score for comparing two population proportions showed a p value of 0.302. A statistically significant difference requires a p value of less than or equal to 0.05.
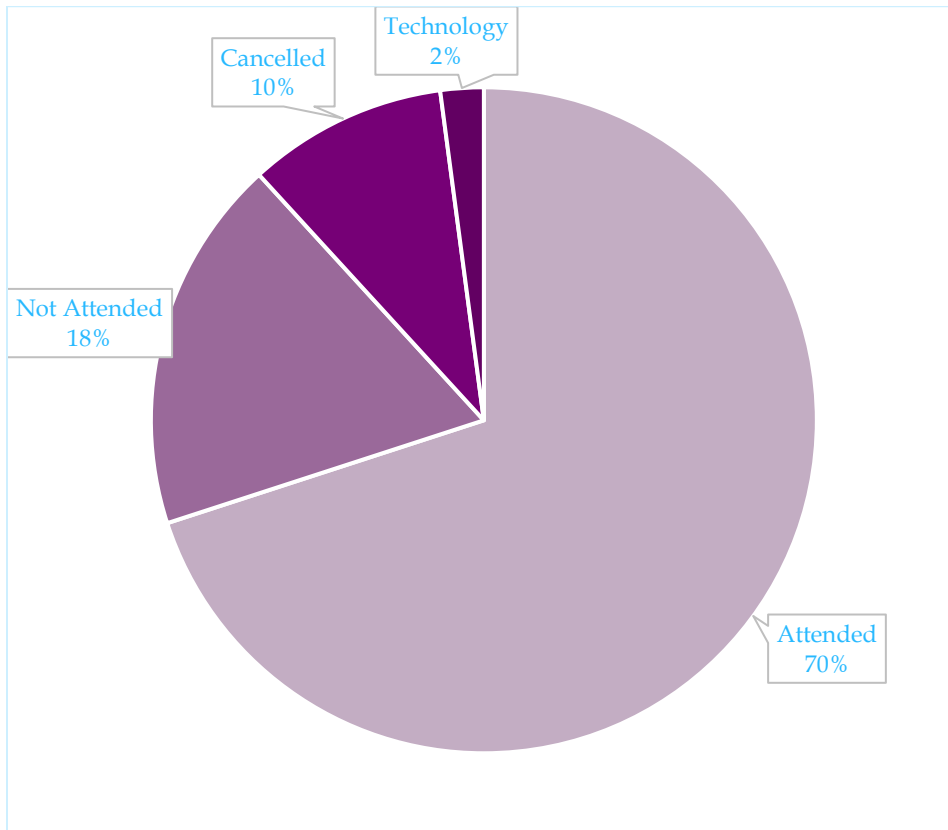
Figure 2: Percentage of classes that were attended, not attended, cancelled, or affected by technology issues.

The programme ran from September 2021 to June 2022. In this time, tutors delivered 2,043 one-to-one tutorials/lessons. Figure 1 shows a breakdown of the number of lessons delivered in each month. As teaching was not interrupted by holidays etc., March, November and May are the months with the highest number of lessons delivered.

Overall attendance at tutorials was 70% (1,419/2,043), 18% (349) of lessons were not attended, 10% (224) were cancelled, and 2% (50) were affected by technological issues (Figure 2). It is also important to note that non-attendance was largely a feature of the latter part of the programme, coinciding as it did with the lifting of pandemic restrictions; the greater availability of extra-curricular activities; and improvements in weather.

Looking at attendance in context is incredibly important and we make later comment about how the quality and commitment of tutors on the programme are essential factors in students' attendance and engagement. Much of this is illustrated in the following case study.

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<u>Case Study: Attendance, Resilience & Discovery:</u>

Student Jade is 13 years old has been involved in the programme from its initial induction at the beginning of the Pandemic in early 2020. Jade currently resides in a small community where she and her family are the only demographic of their ethnicity within the area. Jade has experienced the hardships of discrimination and bullying from children at her school over the years due to her being Roma - which appears to be a common modern day, general narrative, amongst young GRT people in schools across the country.

Jade has always possessed a passion for writing children's stories, bestowed with adventure and fantasy. This is what she considered a form of escapism which filled her with happiness, allowing her to ascend to a platform, free from the regular, harsh daily reality encounters, she had succumbed to within the school environment from her peers.

Her tutor had discovered initially, the joy Jade projects from writing children's stories and is of the professional opinion, that the student possesses a real flair and talent for not only stories but her writing proficiency in general.

Jade is one of the few students currently involved in the programme who is performing above her expected key stage level in all departments of effort, commitment and progression. Her attendance is above 95% and her tutor's weekly lesson reports are exceptional.

Jade's tutor and the ODET team are exploring methods to promote and encourage Jade's exceptional talent. This has only amplified Jade's desire to maximise her potential and continue to illustrate her ability through the hard work and dedication she is currently and persistently conveying.

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Year Two – Progress, Effort and Commitment (PEC)

Tutors were asked to rate students on Progress, Effort and Commitment after each session on a 4-point scale. Table 3 presents the descriptors for each category alongside average percentage of ratings in each category for the year and a single measure (SM) quantifying Progress, Effort and Commitment for the year[4]. The SM shows that

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[4] The single measure (SM) has been calculated for each variable by first multiplying the percentages in category 1,2 3, and 4 by 4, 2, (-1) and (-4) respectively and then calculating the sum of results of the

students were rated highly on all three aspects. It also shows that their commitment was rated highest, followed by Effort and Progress.

Table 3: Overview of rating categories for student Progress, Effort and Commitment and the average percent of ratings in each category for 2021-2022.

Progress		**Effort**		**Commitment**	
1 – Making significant progress, above the key stage target grade/level	37%	1 – Always demonstrates outstanding effort in classwork and homework	47%	1 – Fully engaged in all aspects of the lesson	66%
2 – Making expected progress towards end of the key stage target grade/level	47%	2 – Consistently demonstrates very good effort in classwork and homework	45%	2 – Engaged in all aspects of the lesson	26%
3 – Making some progress but not in line with the key stage target grade/level	15%	3 – Effort in class work and homework is sometimes below expectation	8%	3 – Usually focused in lessons but could make more contributions	8%
4 – Making little or no progress	0%	4 – Regularly makes insufficient effort	1%	4 – Can lack focus but sometimes makes positive contributions	1%
SMP	**2.27**	**SME**	**2.68**	**SMC**	**3.05**

In Figure 3, percentages for category 1 and 2 ratings have been added to show performance at or above the expected level. Correspondingly, the percentages of category 3 and 4 ratings have been added to show performance below the expected level. Tutor ratings show that 85% of students make progress at the expected level or above and that their effort and commitment is above the expected level in 91% of cases.

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multiplications. This produced three values: one each for Progress (SMP), Effort (SME) and Commitment (SMC). The highest potential value signifying maximum Progress, Effort and Commitment is 4 and the lowest is negative 4. The weighting was such that the top and bottom categories will have a greater effect on the overall score than the categories in the middle. For example, the Progress values for September 2021 were 87% in category 1, 6% in category 2, 7% in category 3 and 0% in category 3. The corresponding calculation is therefore: 4 x 87% + 2 x 6% - 2 x 7% - 4 x 0% = 3.53.
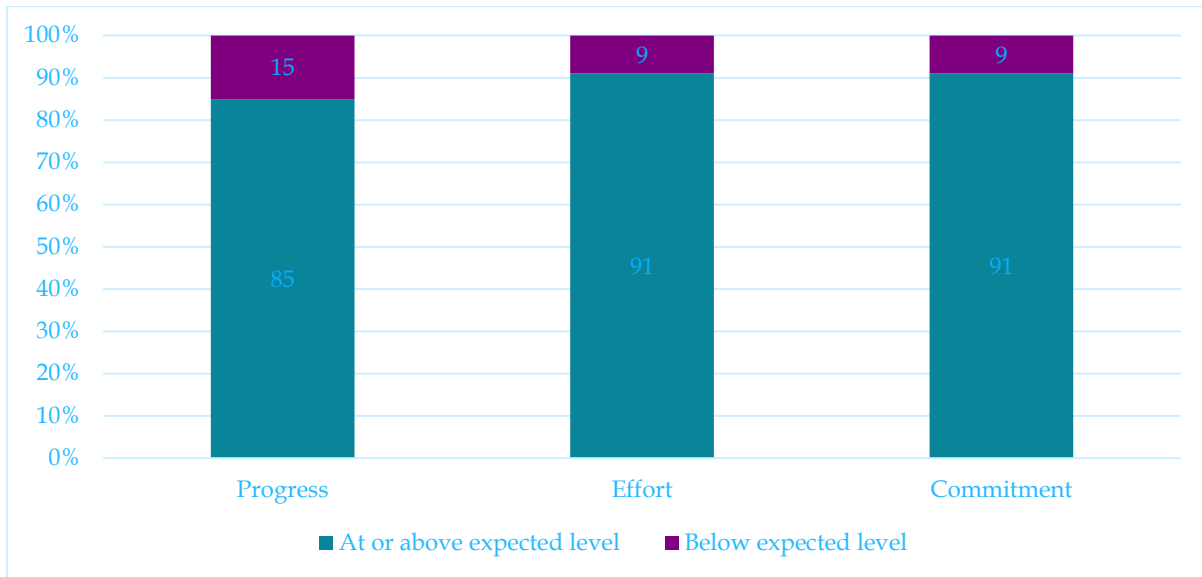
Figure 3: Average tutor ratings for progress, effort and commitment showing performance at or above the expected level and below the expected level.

Changes in ratings across the year using the single measure (SM) for each variable are presented in Figure 4. The data show that Progress, Effort and Commitment remain at a high level throughout the duration of the programme. All ratings dip towards the end of the calendar year but recover slightly with in the new year as we enter spring and summer. Apart from the first month of the programme, student Commitment is the highest rated variable throughout the year, followed by Effort and Progress.
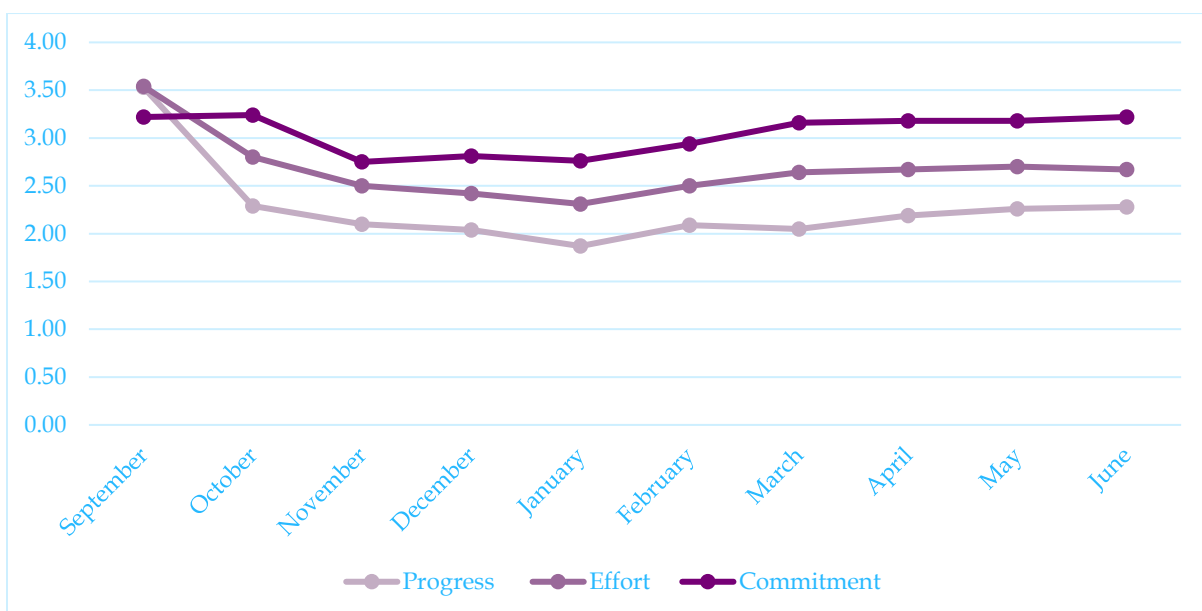

Figure 4: Monthly changes in combined progress, effort, and commitment ratings.

Looking at things such as progress, effort and commitment ratings is interesting in gaining an insight into the degree to which *learning* and the support of ODET's 'Tutors for GRT' programme is valued by the communities. Such evidence runs counter to those populist, deficit ways of making sense of the GRT students' historic underachievement and low engagement. Even under quite exceptional circumstances, effort and commitment show a perseverance where *learning* is concerned. The following case study gives a clear picture of the barriers to overcome and the collaborations between ODET and schools that are enablers towards better outcomes.

Case Study: Perseverance, Partnership & Progress:

Student Liam has been involved in the program since September 2021. He is an 11-year-old Roma boy who had very low numeracy and literacy levels. He has a low level of spoken English and could not write his own name when he joined the program. The school which referred Liam have been instrumental in the support they have offered throughout. Liam works specifically with one of ODET's S.E.N.D. (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) tutors who has a substantial amount of experience in this field and has worked closely with Liam weekly over the past 6 months. Liam also has a Roma speaking interpreter who attends his weekly lesson to bridge the gap of communication between Liam and his tutor.

In the early stages of Liam's program, he found it extremely difficult to comprehend and grasp the theme of each lesson. In the initial weeks little progression was being made. Nevertheless, Liam continued to persevere, and all involved remained patient and committed. As Christmas approached Liam was starting to become more communicative and learning from his lessons. Before Christmas he was able to write his name on paper and count to ten in English.

Since the New Year Liam has made significant progress, elevated himself academically and grown in confidence. He has begun to communicate on a low level with his tutor without the assistance of the interpreter. His referral officer at the school has emphasised the benefits and help the program has delivered for Liam's education along with his personal development in building confidence and self-esteem.

Key Findings - What we've learned from the communities

Introduction

We hope that the previous chapter in the story has given you a sense of what ODET's Tutors for GRT programme has achieved in its second year in terms of who it's helped, schools it has worked with, and, generally, students' engagement. Perhaps most important for us in this second year has been listening and learning from the communities, their children, young people and family members.

So in this chapter, we want to take a look at what they said to us, using a range of different ways. Our purpose was to give a voice to the communities to help us understand their experiences of working with ODET and its tutors, how the programme had been useful for them, and how they felt about learning and education more generally. To help in the readers' understanding of these experiences, we've organised them into a group of themes, a set of mini stories you might say. In doing so, we hope they communicate important things that need to be heard by others.

Quality Tutors – Faith, Skills and Motivation:

Children and young people taking part in the programme used the pedagogical activity to tell us about the high quality of the tutors' work with them. In all of the ways they chose to communicate, this was a continuous thread in their experiences. What was uppermost in their words was a sense that tutors had faith in them and never gave up on them.

I always look forward to having my lessons with you… you're like my hero [and] you always help me with anything I asked for…Whenever I got something wrong and got upset about it, you would always say "don't worry, never give up".

The online programme provided quality time with tutors on a one-to-one basis and this was very much valued by the students. In what they said there was an interesting balance between tutors being supportive and motivating in terms of their developing attitude to learning, and with their help in developing skills. Developing skills in itself, clearly helped students gain confidence.

THE TUITION HAS HELPED ME REALISE LEARNING IS REALLY INTERESTING WHICH MOTIVATED ME TO LEARN MORE. THE IDEAS I HAVE BEEN GIVEN FROM MY TEACHERS HAVE HELPED ME IN MANY WAYS AND I CAN SEE HOW , THROUGHOUT MY TUITION MY WRITING , READING AND OTHER SKILLS HAVE IMPROVED

It is clear in what children and young people said, that tutors had been excellent in building a productive and supportive relationship online. Interestingly, students gave a sense that tutors had time for them, they listened and helped them understand. There was also a feeling that the relationships were ones in which the students didn't feel judged or pressured. As one student wrote, *'I like the program because the tutors are very nice and always have fun. I like that the tutors are not too pushy. I think it helps me learn faster because they never put pressure on us so we are able to focus more an get more time to do homework so then I'm able not to stress'.*

In many ways, the close-to work of ODET's tutors we see talked about here shows many of the qualities that have been highlighted as good practice in research, such as the Traveller Movement's (2019) report. Whilst such work has showcased good practice in a selection of schools, the work of ODET's 'Tutors for GRT',

equally demonstrate the importance of personalised, flexible approaches that engage the students in work that is meaningful, relevant and valued.

ODET's Tuition – An Important Bridge to School

Earlier we spoke about how children, young people and their families have significantly poor experiences of school and how these are inter-generational ones. In the ways such families talked about ODET's online programme, we learned of its importance in relation to transitions to, and engagement, with school. We picked up on students' anxieties about school, but very little of this was to do with their worries about the pandemic. We'll take a look at these anxieties elsewhere in this chapter, but here we want to highlight how 'Tutors for GRT' seems to provide a much needed and valued connector between home and school.

There was a real sense in what students said to us that the focused, purposeful and short bursts of activity involved in the online ODET tuition was valued. The idea that it was *'very accessible'* and, though short in duration, tutors had time to *'explain'* and make

'*clear*' and '*understandable*' came through much of what they wanted to say. Tutors also seemed to model an active, passionate engagement with learning that we saw reflected in their students' own motivation.

> *The tuition has helped me a lot even though i was unsure and stressed how school was going to work in these hard times. I find it very accessible, it doesn't take much of my time so i could focus on other things, but still focus on school at the same time.*

Many students reflected upon the way the online work with ODET's tutors gave them an opportunity to develop and practice their skills. Asked how the tutoring made them feel, many shared in the sentiments of one student who said that it made them *'Happy because I like learning more things like learning to read better'* and that school itself was then

'better because I can read and spell better'. Another student said that *'school was better because I learn more when it's just me and [tutor's name]'*, echoing what many children and young people thought about how one-to-one tutoring was really valued.

Thinking into the future, the post-pandemic world and how we might support children and young people's education in '*catching up´*, the key message from students of these communities engaged in ODET's programme was that it will be essential.

Clearly then, ODET's programme has given students from GRT communities access to professional tutoring that is seen as hugely beneficial in how they think about their progress in school. There are reminders here about what Kellett & Dar (2007) found out about the importance of having spaces and opportunities for private practice. Their study of two school communities, one affluent and one disadvantaged, found that in developing literacy skills, the learning environment and the available resources made a significant impact. ODET's 'Tutors for GRT' may be seen to provide such resources and its approach establishes a positive learning environment for these children and young people.

TIME TO EXPLAIN, TIME TO UNDERSTAND

[online tutoring] makes me feel good because all of the things I miss at school, I can catch up with them. some Saturdays I feel tired and don't want to do it but i am glad when I have done it. ..school is better since I started doing my tutoring because we do topics that I don't always understand at school

I got to learn a lot from very interesting and aspiring people, like my teacher [name], who is a very driven and busy person, but SOMEHOW, she finds time and lots of materials to share with me and others

Anxieties about School – ODET as confidence-building space

Perhaps more than anything, the story of ODET's 'Tutors for GRT', as told by the communities they serve, is one where students build confidence in their educational skills and in themselves. We can see some of their confidence in skills in what they've talked about in earlier sections of this chapter. Yet the central message in the story of ODET's work here is much more important than simply growing confidence in technical skills.

I was scared, shy, nervous, terrified, and frustrated about my first day in school. I wasn't ready to learn as I felt a lot of adrenaline because I was curious about what would happen. [After the programme] Now, I am still shy in school but more comfortable and confident. I am now good at maths, better at English and know how to do more things and follow my dreams

From what other research has told us, the GRT communities are more likely to have poor experiences within the UK's system of education. Transitions between and through schools are of particular worry. In looking at what ODET has achieved in its second year, the communities told us, in guarded ways, about such experiences and the anxieties they involved.

If I could describe starting my first school in five words, I'd describe it as:

Scary, new, nerve-wracking, lonely and competitive

Starting a new, different school must be scary for all children and young people but given the historical experiences of school for GRT students and families, perhaps these are of greater significant here. For a group more likely to experience prejudice, to be threatened with exclusions and to face hostility from non-GRT parents, their words describing anxiety are not ones to be dismissed.

The word '*lonely*' is interesting here, perhaps telling of the pressure to make connections with others and the fears that you might not. In many of the pieces of student work we read or listened to, their worries of whether other students and class teachers would be

> *I disliked school because of the new people, because I had no clue who they were. So I kept my head down so people wouldn't see my tears. I said I wanted to see my mom, at least in my head. I was shy and didn't know what to do there. I started having a panic attack until a teacher asked if I was okay and she said if you wanted [I] could do some colouring in sheets*

'*nice'*, or about feeling isolated, on their own, not knowing anybody, these words stood out. There was also a sense of bullying that they kept to themselves, didn't talk about much. Perhaps that was what was meant by '*competitive*', not being supportive of each other and working together, but being up against others. A sense that sometimes you survived school, you got through it using your own means of coping. Most of all, you kept its emotional impact on you out of sight.

School has been so much easier since tutoring [with tutor name]. School feels like so much better and all the support I've been getting from you… I am really grateful for everything…I really hope our lessons can continue as I have really enjoyed this term

Like this teacher, someone being aware and getting involved, showing kindness, could make a difference. This was very much the sense we got about ODET's tutors. Although operating online, their approach showed interest and kindness. They were '*patient'*.

So when students were given opportunities to share their experiences of education they talked about anxieties both in terms of a lack of confidence in their own skills and in their interaction with others in school. Yet when they did, they were keen to point out

how their engagement with ODET's online programme, their work and their relationship with their ODET tutor, had made a difference and how they were more at ease, more confident. Now they could go to school and learn the wide range of subjects available in school. School was important, but ODET made learning '*fun*', '*interesting*', '*enjoyable*' and '*understandable*'. It made learning possible.

In the final part of the story we want to help the children and young people say something about another important contrast they felt when thinking about school, about learning and about 'Tutors for GRT'.

Valuing Learning despite School

There was an overwhelming sense from students' voices that learning was important, particularly in developing essential skills and gaining meaningful knowledge. Some students talked about how it was related to future careers, and they highlighted the importance of Mathematics, of good literacy skills, and the value of science.

This might seem like it's straight out of policy textbook, like a copied down set of expectations, directly from government. It was more than that.

In expressing their valuing of *learning*, students gave us a glimpse into the contrasting world of *school,* as they experienced it and how their parents experienced it. Learning with ODETs tutors was fun and creative; it was made interesting and inquiring; it was at the learner's pace to help it to be understandable; and there was a balance of activities.

So when children and young people talked about how, at school, sometimes the work was hard, they told us how those core skills and curriculum areas, they wanted those balanced with others that made them feel calmer and less anxious (perhaps some of the anxiety was the pressure placed on maths, literacy and science?). They made much of the importance of a core of subjects (especially mathematics and literacy), but they were interested in history, and they wanted the arts and music – they were '*peaceful and calming'*.

The same interest in and valuing of learning was found in parents and there were indications of such commitments to learning later in life, despite poor experiences of school.

> *My Dad only went to school until he was eight years old. My grandad died so they moved around with Granny. [Now] Dad is learning his maths and computers with a tutor this year and he's 54 years old! Dad said he wants me to learn now and to listen at school. I am trying at school but [name of ODET tutor] is better. She helps me even with maths and science. She explains.*

What comes through then is real valuing of learning, seeing the importance of it but, at the same time, poor experiences of school and its relationships, often leading to early exits from education. Children and young people told of these parental experiences, of their mothers and fathers.

Researchers such as Myers & Bhopal (2009) and the Traveller Movement (2019) have shown how racism and the treatment of GRT communities, Europe-wide has continuously labelled them as '*strangers*' and '*outsiders*' in one way or another. It is perhaps unsurprising then that in what children and young people said about school, they sought safety in that which was familiar and they were anxious in times of transition, when things were changing.

> *it was hard in school for my mum. sometimes she enjoyed school but education in Poland is really hard and the most challenge was racism in school*

Perhaps then, there is one final contrasting comparison that students made, when thinking about why they valued the learning they did with their ODET tutor. Sometimes they talked about how learning in school was difficult because of others, not because they didn't like learning. In fact, as one child wrote, '*I prefer this (online tutoring through ODET) to learning in class because sometimes it can get a little tricky in class with other people, who can sometimes make it hard to concentrate.*' Another, when writing about how school made them feel wrote, '*Sometimes happy and sometimes nervous and frustrated because of the noise*'.

There was also a sense that the online work with their ODET tutors gave them consistency in approach and protected time. Again, students here would mention transitions to different schools and classes where '*Learning got harder and it was very different since it was a higher year and a different school… so they had different learning [teaching] methods that I know.*' They valued education, were keen to learn but '*there are 30 people in [ ] class which is a lot [and] sometimes when I need help. The teacher does not have the time to help all of us*'.

In all of their responses, children, young people and their families saw ODET's 'Tutors for GRT' programme as making a huge impact, in their school work but also in their rounded development as people, more confident in the world around them. It was a programme not to be lost.

[My mom] thinks ODET is helping me tremendously and that I am learning so much and have so much confidence in my work. She thinks that I feel at ease and really look forward to my lessons with [tutor name]. She says that [tutor name] is absolutely amazing with me.

I hope [tutor's name] can help other boys like me

Conclusion

ODET's 'Tutors for GRT' programme has made a significant impact on the learning of children and young people from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities across the UK. Although arising from the specific circumstances presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, its contribution extends further than this, providing a much-needed bridge between home and school. Not only has its work improved students' learning skills, but perhaps more telling is how their lived experiences of learning are now rich in confidence and possibility.

We have been so grateful that the communities have given us an insight into their experiences of education. We hope that we have been able to help give voice to the things they found most important to say about the invaluable work of ODET and its tutors. For communities that have endured longstanding hardships and poor outcomes in educational terms, programmes like ODET's are crucial in making learning accessible. It is one

essential step in the long journey towards real change.

We have been able to highlight several key issues in this report and draw attention to the important achievements of the programme, as seen through the eyes of those children, young people and families that have first-hand experience of its support. Yet there is one message that comes through louder than the rest.

What we have learned in looking into ODET's services, is that these are communities where *learning* is valued, where engaging with education is important in their worlds, where it has purpose and meaning across generations. It is important in getting on, for children's futures and an important part of being a parent.

However, ODET's work shows us that engagement with *learning* is built on strong, productive and respectful relationships. It requires patience, physical and emotional resources and

trust for it to have a chance. Without these, and without the stores of cultural and social capital secured by those more privileged, engagement is fragile. It is like water seeping through fingers as you try to drink in knowledge.

Sadly, the communities didn't experience *learning* in school classrooms in the same way. Not in the past or present. Instead, schools were places where you were fearful, under threat, in competition; where you were uncertain as to how you would be treated and where teachers may not have time for you, should you not understand. Schools and their classrooms were places that could make you feel isolated, insecure.

Not all students would talk about school in such ways. Not all schools are experienced as hostile places. But we know from research with GRT communities; with those from less affluent backgrounds; from those in corporate care; from displaced indigenous populations; from people of colour, that such communities are more likely to experience institutions of

education in this way. It is no wonder that sometimes they seem to choose to disengage.

One look at the work and achievements of Open Doors Education and Training, shows us that, for the children, young people and communities it reaches, change is possible. Speaking truthfully, such change requires sustained investment, financially and intellectually; honest, non-partisan collaboration and, above all, a political willingness to imagine the world differently.

We stand with them, hopeful.

ODET Tutors for GRT pupil John William Chates won pupil of the year at his school in 2022! His mum Mary commented: " So proud of him and thank you for all the help. His teacher spoke about how much his confidence has really grown".

Recommendations

At the start of the report, we asked what might recovery look like, thinking about how the educational setbacks, post-pandemic, might be addressed. For the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities – like for all communities that have been subject to longstanding educational injustices – it's not simply a case of regaining the ground lost since March 2020. Our recommendations then are voiced to reflect the greater journey of change that remains, and in which we believe organisations like ODET have a huge part to play.

- *A first step cannot be an 'only step':*
This report has shown how different approaches to engagement are essential to enabling the valuing of learning we see in the communities to be translated into successful educational outcomes. ODET's online provision, free at the point of delivery, has been a long-overdue first step but its successes require a longer-term strategy for ensuring such services are continued. Our first recommendation is that community-focused organisations like **ODET should be a key component in building pathways to recovery for GRT**

communities. They provide a much-needed bridge between the communities and schools and, therefore, their role will be pivotal in supporting children and young people's learning in ways that facilitate better outcomes at school.

- *Strategic thinking and investment beyond pandemic recovery:*
ODET's online provision arose from the COVID-19 pandemic and concerns about learning loss. However, where GRT communities are concerned, confining strategic thinking and action to post-pandemic recovery alone, fails to recognise historical disadvantage and underachievement.

Our second recommendation is that **alternative educational provision, accessible online should be a permanent feature of personalised learning support for GRT students and their communities,** allied to schools for those disadvantaged. Investment needs to be a central commitment, locally responsive and targeted.

- *Adult education must be part of the picture:*
Historically poor experiences of school and underachievement are

generationally felt and they impact upon a community's capacity to sustain any gains made by any learning interventions at the level of the child. We recommend that **partnerships and/or extensions of services with providers of community-facing adult education be developed as a key aspect of any strategic response, aimed at improving learning for GRT communities.** Child-centredness requires the building of a supportive infrastructure and that means tackling adult learning hand-in-hand.

That said, any approach to adult learning requires existing models of adult education to be re-thought in the same, creative ways ODET has engaged with children and young people. Central to this will be the valuing of communities by educators as rich cultures, with centuries of history, knowledge and traditions, with contributions to make.

- *Developing a racial literacy for schools needs to extend to knowledge-building about GRT communities:*

We have learned how there is a stark contrast between how members of the communities valued *learning* and yet had poor experiences of *school*. Flowing from the Traveller Movement's (2019) identification of schools' good practice, we further recommend that a **key component of all schools' continuous and professional learning should include a focus on building a racial literacy about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.**

Such professional learning and development should have a whole-school focus, not only informing classroom practices but also the processes and mechanisms through which the institution engages with GRT families more widely. Racial literacy needs to be a central part of a school's conversations in developing strategies for inclusion and the meeting of students' needs through reasonable adjustment.

- *More focused and a greater strategic generation and use of data:*
To enable education services such as ODET to develop better and more

targeted provisions for GRT communities, a more nuanced use of data is required. Given the communities' poor experiences of institutions, we recommend that more creative means of generating knowledge about communities are utilised.

Valuing their voices and their lived experiences, across the generations will be an important step in understanding how institutions of education can build trust and how they can develop a community-informed understanding of how learning is best grown. It needs to be a conversation.

The next steps towards change are those best taken together.

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