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Traveller Transitions: Racialised Inequalities in Education

Co- produced by the School of Education, University College Cork (UCC) and Cork Traveller Education Unit.

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Co-Produced Research Approach

The research was co-produced by the School of Education, University College Cork (UCC) and the Cork Traveller Education Unit (which included the Traveller Visibility Group Cork (TVG) and the Southern Traveller Health Network (STHN)). The study was underpinned by a commitment to cultural respect, shared ownership, and the inclusion of Traveller voices at every stage, from concept to completion. Co-production enabled the research team to access participants through trusted community relationships and to ensure cultural sensitivity in both design and execution. Traveller mentors and organisational partners supported participant recruitment, provided context for interpretation of findings, and helped uphold the ethical and participatory values of the study.

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Summary of Key Findings

Key Finding 1 :	Young people find the loss of tailored supports in the transition from primary to post-primary school extremely difficult.
Key Finding 2:	Segregation is a feature of schooling for Traveller young people and a significant factor in thinking about school leaving.
Key Finding 3:	Anti-Traveller Racism is not always experienced as overt; it happens through everyday micro-aggressions.
Key Finding 4:	Traveller young people's bodies are often policed in ways that fail to take culture and circumstance into account, resulting in disproportionate punitive effects.
Key Finding 5:	Relationships between Traveller young people and school staff are crucial but most Traveller young people in this study reported negative relationships with teachers.
Key Finding 6:	Some schools create barriers to Traveller belonging through preventing Traveller young people's social interaction.
Key Finding 7:	Some schools can be hostile places that cause much hurt and pain for Traveller young people.

Overview

Background

The Irish Traveller community is a recognised ethnic minority with a unique cultural heritage, yet Travellers remain one of the most marginalised groups in the Irish education system (Department of Justice and Equality 2017, OECD 2024). Despite policy commitments to equity and inclusion, outlined in the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (2017–2021), the Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (2024-2030), and through Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) policy (2017), Traveller pupils continue to face barriers to full participation and success in education. Indeed, Travellers experience a very different trajectory through education when compared with the wider population as a result of structural racism (Powell et al. 2024). 68% of Traveller children attend early childhood education, compared with 95% of the wider population and only 27% of young Travellers have completed at least upper-secondary education, compared with 97% of the wider population (FRA 2024). Less than 1% of Travellers are in third-level education, with only 167 adult Travellers reported as holding a third-level qualification (0.5%) (Brennan et al. 2024).

Early post-primary school is a particularly vulnerable time period and a formative turning point for Traveller students. There are several factors that contribute to the disproportionately higher dropout rates of Travellers by mid post-primary school. In the first instance, there are systemic barriers in Traveller students being able to attend certain schools. Despite changes in legislation, the prominence of legacy rules in school admissions policies (Smith 2014) continue to negatively affect Travellers' potential to access certain post-primary schools. The result is that a de facto system of school segregation has evolved, whereby Traveller students are disproportionately represented in some schools (McGinley & Keane 2021). When Travellers move from primary to post-primary, the transition is often marked by the loss of previously available tailored supports (Quinlan 2021). In addition young Travellers largely don't see Travellers in the teaching profession (Burns et al. 2022; Heinz and Keane 2018), nor do they see their lives, culture or history reflected positively in curricula (Kavanagh and Dupont 2021; Limerick Traveller Network & Exchange House Ireland 2025; NCCA 2019).

Many Travellers describe how teachers adopt a 'cultural deficit lens' and associate them with being responsible for the inequalities that they experience (McGinley 2024; Quinlan 2021; McGinley and Keane, 2021). We know that relationships with teachers and teacher expectations are hugely important factors in student participation and attainment (Smyth 2020). Yet, many young people describe low teacher expectations and poor relationships with their teachers (Dupont 2022, Quinlan 2021; Boyle et al. 2020). Furthermore, Travellers predominantly attend DEIS schools and students in DEIS schools are more likely to experience higher levels of negative feedback from teachers than their middle-class peers (Fleming and Harford 2023). In addition, Traveller parents and guardians describe negative and often discriminatory experiences in dealing with school authorities (FRA 2024; Brennan et al. 2024; Bhopal 2011). Assumptions are very often made that Traveller parents are disinterested in their children's education but research with Traveller parents dispels such myths and evidences that they have ambition for their children's education achievements despite their awareness of the barriers that they face (Boyle et al. 2020). These barriers include everyday experiences of normalised racism (ISSU 2026; McGinley & Keane, 2022; Boyle et al. 2018) and higher levels of bullying (Devine et al. 2025; Dupont 2022; FRA 2019), which impact negatively on the mental health of Traveller young people (Villani and Barry 2021).

Despite the growing evidence of the persistence of discrimination in schools, inequalities in educational experience and outcomes for Traveller young people continue to be reproduced in the Irish school system. This study adds to the research base and contributes to our understandings of racism and discrimination from the perspective of those who experience it in their everyday lives. It prioritises the voices of Traveller young people, their families, and Traveller mentors, yielding in-depth insight into the entrenched nature of Traveller exclusion within the Irish education system.

Methods

Research Design

A qualitative research design was adopted to explore the lived experiences of Traveller young people and their families in post-primary education in Cork City. The aim was to capture rich, context-specific data that foregrounded the perspectives of those who are directly impacted by systemic inequalities within the education system. Data were collected by two researchers, Dr. Gemma Campion from UCC and Rachel Coffey who is from a Traveller woman and works as a Traveller youth worker and mentor. The research team was conscious of the need to ensure that the young people felt safe and comfortable when discussing their school experience and having a Traveller researcher supported this endeavour.

Participants and Data Collection

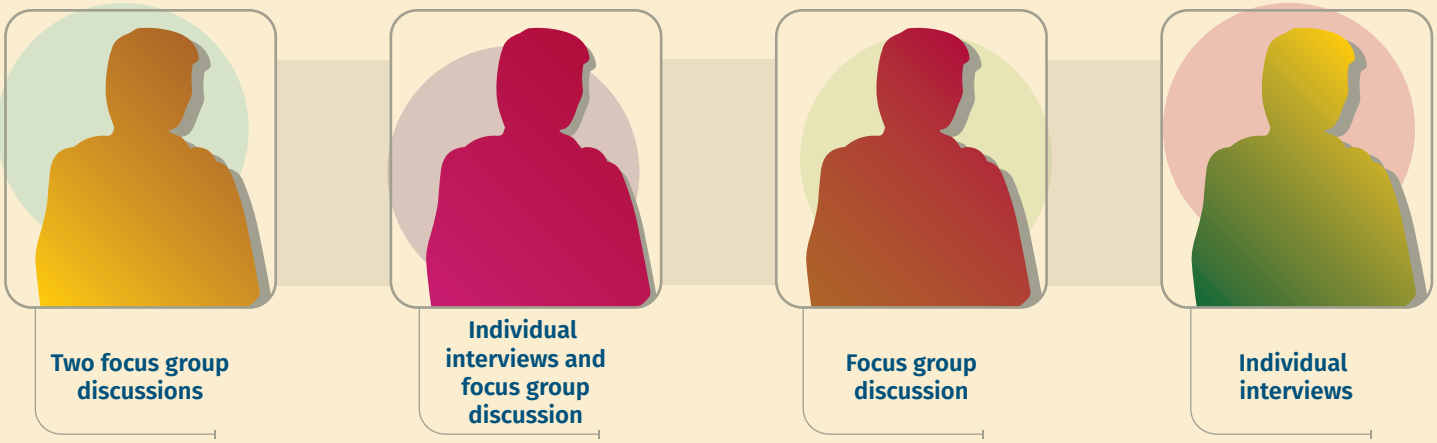
The study involved a total of twenty-nine participants, who were all assigned pseudonyms for the purpose of anonymity. All Traveller participants were recruited through community outreach by mentors, building upon the networks of the Traveller Visibility Group (TVG) and the Southern Traveller Health Network (STHN). The student participants attended/had attended a range of post primary schools. School staff participants were recruited through contacting schools. While four post-primary schools in Cork City with a known Traveller population were approached, only one agreed to participate. For ethical and anonymity reasons, the participating principal and teachers are referred to collectively as school staff. The reluctance of schools to get involved was a disappointing result and potentially highlights the discomfort generated within the education system in relation to discussing/addressing Traveller educational experiences.

Data were collected through a combination of focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews in May and June 2025. Eight Traveller young people (aged 14–17) took part in individual interviews conducted with the Traveller researcher. This was followed up with a focus group discussion (led by the UCC researcher) with five young women (aged 14 and 15), three of whom also took part in the individual interviews. In addition, the UCC researcher conducted focus groups with 13 Traveller mothers and three Traveller mentors, as well as three individual interviews with school staff (one principal and two teachers). All interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the Social Research Ethics Committee at UCC and was governed by ethical principles including anonymity; confidentiality; the safety of participants; informed consent; and freedom to withdraw from the study. The UCC researchers (who are white settled Irish) worked closely with the Traveller members of the team to ensure a culturally sensitive Traveller and child centred approach, recognising the importance of trust amidst intergenerational experiences of systemic inequalities.

Participants and Data Collection Methods



Young People Participants



Key Themes

1. The Loss of Supports in the Transition to Post-Primary School

For many Traveller young people, the move from primary to post-primary school was described as a significant rupture in their educational journey - a turning point where school began to feel less safe, less supportive, and increasingly alienating. Some participants recalled primary school as a more positive environment, where teachers were described as more understanding and culturally responsive, and where they had lessons that focused on discussing Traveller culture and the importance of family. In contrast, secondary school marked the onset of negative experiences, with many of the young people reporting that they did not feel welcome or included.

This shift became more pronounced over time and the young people, the mothers and mentors all raised alienation as a key component of decision-making in relation to leaving school before completing the Leaving Certificate. The most notable change in terms of institutional structure from primary to post -primary was identified as the decrease in tailored support such as Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), the Supporting Traveller and Roma (STAR) programme, and access to Traveller Mentors. The following are some examples of the young people's articulation of their perception of the benefits of these supports:

> **"I just haven't really had the best experience with school. I think first year was alright because we had good SNAs that would have a lot of time for you and if you were struggling they would help you. And if you wanted to learn anything specifically about your background or anything like that like they would help you, but then they all kind of went away after first year."**
> *(Lily, 15).*

> **"In the primary school, when Rebecca [a Traveller mentor] did the homework school, I loved that. I used to come to school every day over it."**
> *(Carol, 15).*

The Traveller mentors described the importance of a safe space for the Traveller young people to open up, which the children had experienced in primary school but now no longer existed:

> **"Well just as Travellers, you just trust other Travellers anyway. Because you relate to them like... they're more comfortable. Inside the schools I work with, you see, it just takes a few weeks in order for them to get used to seeing you...it wouldn't happen in the first few weeks but...after a few weeks, a few months, slowly, they'll start saying stuff slowly. Then, every...week we see them — well some of the ones I'm in anyway — they'll open up about stuff."**
> *(Sinéad, Mentor).*

Mentors and mothers described schools as reluctant to collaborate with Traveller support organisations. This was perceived as part of a broader institutional culture that often failed to provide Traveller-specific supports, despite evidence of their effectiveness. Institutional resistance to Traveller support organisations and mentors was felt by the young people who described supports such as the STAR programme and Traveller mentors as beneficial in primary school but then absent in secondary school:

> **"Although we worked with the kids from there they wouldn't let us in to the school... He [Principal] wasn't willing to work with us."**
> *(Mary, Mentor).*

> **"They won't engage at all at all."**
> *(Sadhbh, Parent FG 1).*

> **"They wouldn't even meet us (STAR programme) on zoom three years ago. That's how bad it is."**
> *(Rebecca, Parent FG 1)*

The school staff also highlighted the need for better structures to be put in place to support the transition from primary to post-primary school. Changes such as having multiple subjects with different teachers — combined with the loss of additional supports - make the transition extra difficult and unsettling for Traveller students. The mentors suggested that the impacts of this change are not given enough attention in the busy life of post-primary schools.

Key Finding 1 :	Young people find the loss of tailored supports in the transition from primary to post-primary school extremely difficult.

2. Institutional Racism

In this study there were three key ways in which institutional racism manifested: (a) explicit segregation of Traveller young people; (b) social exchanges that constructed Traveller culture as deficient and (c) specific and targetted disciplining of Traveller bodies.

Institutional racism and the continued segregation of Traveller young people

While the practice of formally segregating Traveller young people from their settled peers on the basis of ethnic identity is now recognised as a form of overt racism, segregation continues in subtle ways such that Travellers are disproportionately attending some schools (McGinley and Keane 2021). However, this research shows how segregating practices also continue to be enacted inside schools. Examples of segregation practices — grouping Traveller pupils together or isolating them within schools — were reported by the mothers in both focus groups:

> **"They have a small little classroom for them... It's like a behavioural class, but 99% of the children in there are young Travellers. But they'll say that it's open to all the young people... but if you go in there, 99% are Traveller from [name of site] halting site."**
> *(Nuala, Parent FG 1).*

> **"The settled children and Travelling children should be together with the same problems and go out together and come in together. But down this corridor was the Travellers and down this corridor was the settled people."**
> *(Belinda, Parent FG 2).*

Segregating practices were also reported by the young people, and they identified how being separated out so regularly caused feelings of wanting to leave school:

> **"I gets taken out for like basically every class. So... I don't really know what's going on in class because I'm mainly taken out...The boredom and all that. I don't like it. It makes me just want to leave."**
> *(Clara, 16).*

> **"They just put like all the Travellers into a different class... To a lower grade place."**
> *(Jack, 17).*

Of course, many schools have dedicated staff that withdraw children to support their individual needs. However, the parents, mentors and young people in this study reported how Traveller children were so often separated

away from their peers into a class or group on their own. These accounts underline the need for further exploration into how 'behaviour' is being understood and operationalised by school staff such that Traveller children are being separated into class groups on their own. Further action on this is crucial because we know that segregating practices can be devastating for children and that they can have a hugely negative impact on their wellbeing and inter-peer relationships (McGillicuddy 2021). Furthermore, as reported by many of the young people, these practices are undoubtedly a significant factor in the disproportionate drop-out rates of Traveller young people in post-primary schools.

Key Finding 2:	Segregation is a feature of schooling for Traveller young people and a significant factor in thinking about school leaving.

Institutional racism and the everyday construction of Traveller culture as deficient

An example of the construction of Traveller culture as deficient came in the form of attention given to the young people's standard of hygiene and cleanliness. Traveller parents reported receiving comments like "oh they are spotless clean". Given that the Traveller community has long been constructed in policy and political imaginaries as lacking hygiene (for example in the 1963 Report of the Commission on Itinerancy), the remarkability of cleanliness highlights the persistence of the cultural assumption amongst the settled community that Travellers are unclean. When this issue was raised by a mother in one of our focus groups, it became clear that all of the Traveller mothers had similar stories to tell:

Nuala: **At the time we didn't even realise that this was anything degrading or anything, but it was only afterwards we realised that it was. Like you might get a comment like, Oh you was always very clean, everyday.**

Rebecca: **Yeah. Yeah, they still would say that. Oh, they are spotless clean.**

Nuala: **Oh you are very clean. Do you know that way? It's not expected out of you like because you're a Traveller, so you should be dirty, you know. Or look at you now don't you always have your lunch?".**

Rebecca: **"I remember saying to a teacher out in [school name] why wouldn't they be washed and clean?.**

Such statements are uttered in ways that, even at first hearing, some parents themselves didn't interpret as insulting. Such comments are very hard to interrupt or combat because they are spoken within a spirit of praise and kindness. The staff, however, are ultimately registering a surprise that the children are clean in a way that a settled parent/guardian would never experience. These everyday, throw-away comments are a reminder of the long-lasting nature of damaging myths and narratives about Travellers, and how they continue to form part of the subtle, but nonetheless extremely hurtful micro-agressions that Travellers experience on an everyday basis.

Key Finding 3:	Anti-Traveller Racism is not always experienced as overt; it happens through everyday micro-aggressions.

Institutional racism and the disciplining of Traveller bodies

Many participants described being treated differently from their peers, often targeted for minor behaviour or isolated from their friends. Disciplinary measures were perceived as harsher for Traveller students, reinforcing a sense of injustice. In many cases raised in this study, the discipline was in response to perceived bodily transgressions.

For example, Belinda's son was suspended over an incident with his uniform being covered in mud:

> **"You know one of my boys got suspended. And he's so quiet I don't know how he got suspended because he's that quiet you wouldn't even know he was there. And he got on with all the teachers, no problem. How he got suspended was he came home for his lunch in his school clothes and all the school clothes got destroyed with muck at the back because where we were living at the time, he got all muck up the back of his clothes. You know, running down where we were, they got covered in muck. So he took them off because he was always a clean child coming to school and he put on his tracksuit. And when he got to the door she turned them around at the door and put them out."**
> *(Belinda, Parent FG 2).*

Instead of being supported to return to school, the young man was punished for wearing ordinary clothes.

Another parent, Emma, reported her son being expelled because of leaving class to go to the toilet without permission:

> **"My son got expelled that time for asking to go to the toilet. 15 times because they wouldn't let him go to the toilet...That was nearly an hour and two hours later. Whatever class he was in and he kept saying, I need to go. I need to go bad. So he ended up getting up and walking to the toilet. He was brought to the office then and I was called up."**
> *(Emma, Parent FG 2).*

Again, here, we see a heavily punitive response to a perceived bodily transgression. The policing of Traveller bodies was also raised by the young people. For instance, Lily described how Traveller 'demeanour' is read negatively:

> **"Like with me when I go into school, I hang around with my cousins and my family. So then, by doing that then, you're just classed as trouble... Yeah, even when you're not doing anything, like, could be just chatting, like, you're just classed as trouble by your demeanour, just by chatting and by knowing who you are."**
> *(Lily, 15).*

There was a sense conveyed by both the mothers and the young people that any form of expression of being a Traveller was met with punitive measures. This included a focus on hair, with one mother explaining that her daughter was expelled for having hair extensions

> **"I had my last little girl and she got expelled. Because she had extensions... But literally, they just wanted her out."**
> *(Karen, FG 2).*

Given the importance of women's hair in Traveller culture (McDonagh 2021), this form of disciplining of the female Traveller body may be regarded as a racialised punishment. The particular focus on discipling through a focus on the body is a phenomenon found in other research on ethnic and racialised minorities (e.g. Garratt 2016) and needs to have greater recognition within the Irish school system as a form of racism and discrimination.

Key Finding 4:	Traveller young people's bodies are often policed in ways that fail to take culture and circumstance into account, resulting in disproportionate punitive effects.

3. Mostly Negative Emotional Experiences of School

For the Traveller young people the 'feeling' of school was a significant concern. School is not just a learning experience but an emotional one, and Traveller young people did not have the luxury of assuming that school was a place where they would feel happy, safe, and valued. In fact, this study highlighted the emotional toll on both parents and children, including feelings of fear, resentment, and lowered self-worth. We have identified three deeply emotional aspects of school experience that make-or-break feelings of inclusion or exclusion: (a) relationships with teachers (b) the adverse effects of being separated from friends and kin and, (c) the hurt and pain caused by school.

Relationships with teachers

Relationships were identified as key to whether the emotional experience of school was positive or negative. Despite challenges, participants identified individual teachers and mentors as crucial to fostering a supportive environment. Positive relationships acted as a buffer against inequities, however, positive relationships with individual teachers were often described as the exception rather than the norm. Most participants described painful or strained interactions with school staff.

> **"They just make you feel like you're not welcome."**
> *(Jane, 14).*

> **"You would get along with a teacher if they kind of put in the work to get along with you. Yeah, but the teachers just pick and choose. Like, if my teacher helped me, like, I'd like her more. But they don't really care."**
> *(Bríd, 14)*

> **"The teachers annoy me, wreck my head."**
> *(Jack, 17).*

> **"I had one or two good teachers, but the rest of the teachers not really. Like, there will be one or two teachers that would give you their time, like, and talk to you and try to understand you. But the rest of the teachers, just not great."**
> *(Lily, 15).*

The teachers in the study were self selected and interested in Traveller young people and so it is not surprising that they highlighted the importance of positive relationships with the pupils and a socially just orientation to education:

> **"I think I have a good relationship with them. Honestly, I'm mad about them. That sounds very personal. I'm just mad about them and it's all about a bit of trust. Like any young person."**
> *(Melissa, School Staff).*

> **"They're children. They're students. They deserve to be in a place where they can be educated properly and as fully to support them as fully as possible, you know... these are young people, these are children with needs. They're kind of up against it a little more in certain areas for sure. So, you know, like any young person I've ever met, I suppose you try and meet people where they are and work with them from where they are from their level of understanding from their level."**
> *(Melissa, School Staff).*

However, it is not enough to rely on the goodwill of individual teachers in pursuit of social justice in education for Traveller young people. The issues highlighted here are systemic and require structural rather than individualised solutions.

Key Finding 5:	Relationships between Traveller young people and school staff are crucial but most Traveller young people in this study reported negative relationships with teachers.

The adverse effects of being separated from friends and kin

While Travellers continue to be segregated from their settled peers through the disciplining practices of schools (as highlighted above), they simultaneously experience social separation from other Travellers in classrooms and the school social environment. The system of combining the practices of both segregation and separation created a double-bind of exclusion for Traveller young people. They emphasised that being socially separated from their Traveller friends and kin was fundamentally detrimental to their emotional wellbeing and their sense of belonging in school. Peer relationships were a critical protective factor for the young people in this study and friendships with fellow Travellers helped some pupils to remain engaged by providing emotional support in what many perceived as an otherwise hostile environment:

> **"Yeah you can tell that a few other teachers too don't like Travellers. Like from the start, I was told I was mixing with the wrong group and then they won't allow us to sit together and they try and move us apart from each other."**
> *(Bríd, 14).*

> **"If they were just more lenient on letting you sit with your friends at lunchtime and kind of like chatting and got, like more interactive ways of learning and more interesting ways of learning that actually make you want to learn, you're more interested in."**
> *(Lily, 15).*

The young women went on to describe the importance of the lunch break to spend time with friends and to have a mental break from school work. That they were being denied this and put in uncomfortable positions by being made sit to with people they were not friends with for lunch.

> *Bríd:* **Yeah. We weren't allowed sit with each other at lunch or anything, they would separate us and put us into our year group.**
>
> *Lily:* **And like my sister used to go to school like, and we would always like sit together. Then they kind of separated it, where you were only allowed sit with your own year, and then they assigned tables where you were only allowed sit with certain students. So then you go into the lunchroom and there'd be big labels on top of the top of the tables (laughing) about where everyone is to sit. It's lunchtime like that's your time to chat with everyone, for to sit down and to eat your lunch.**

Julia expressed further the importance of relationships for her enjoyment of school:

> **"Because no one is really talking to me especially during the breaks. I don't like that because I'm sitting there, like, by myself. And do you know if the teachers go for walks I have no one to talk to. But me and my cousin, like, we tried to ask the teacher. She was actually quite understanding. We have some classes together. We just don't have core, which is like all our classes. We have like four classes together, so it's kind of better and you enjoy it more when you're with your cousin. I love those classes then."**
> *(Julia, 14).*

Presumably, the practice of restricting and controlling social interaction amongst Traveller young people at school is based on an idea of what some schools think integration ought to look like. However, the loneliness experienced by Julia at lunchtime is a powerful indictment of this practice. Furthermore, her positive reflections on being allowed to work with her cousin during class further highlight the importance of attuning to how the young people themselves feel and what actually best facilitates and maximises their learning and feelings of belonging at school.

Key Finding 6:	Some schools create barriers to Traveller belonging through preventing Traveller young people's social interaction.

The hurt and pain caused by school

Echoing other studies with Traveller adults (McKey et al. 2022) several pupils disclosed serious mental health struggles, including anxiety and depression, and linked these to a lack of care and empathy at school. Jack (17) stated he felt "unwanted" in school and "can't wait to be out of there". Jack's quotation echoes others in this study, who explained how schools were experienced mostly as places of distress. One mother, Rebecca, told the harrowing account of her son stating "I'd rather be dead" than go back to school. She further expressed the mental toll not only on her child but on her as a parent:

> **"You would just be scared to death for like for the teenagers you know to go like that. Like actually having a young boy teenager, right? I actually like more worried about anxiety because he actually started crying that weekend and being, like: 'I would rather be dead than go in there'... So, like, you'd be devastated. Like even having a young Traveller child, you know, on top of all the other conditions out there you know. You know what I mean? Like, you know, the worry. It's hard."**
> *(Rebecca, Parent FG 1).*

She felt the treatment her son was receiving was discriminatory and that staff were unfairly targeting him:

> **"It is bullying. It's intimidating... But I just think that it was kind of like, underhanded, a bit nasty with him...she'd come in — the Vice Principal — and just do this — look them up and down. Every morning was nearly, like, a battle. [And I'm] always like: 'ignore her, keep your head down, don't interact with her'. I could see it, bubbling up in him."**
> *(Rebecca, Parent FG 1).*

Another mother, who is also a mentor, described how miserable school made her son:

> **"He left school now since second year...No one called to my house. I did try and make him go but I do not blame him for not wanting to go. He was never a bold child but I accepted in the end that it wasn't for him. He was unhappy. You know, he was miserable. So I just accepted it."**
> *(Mary, Mentor).*

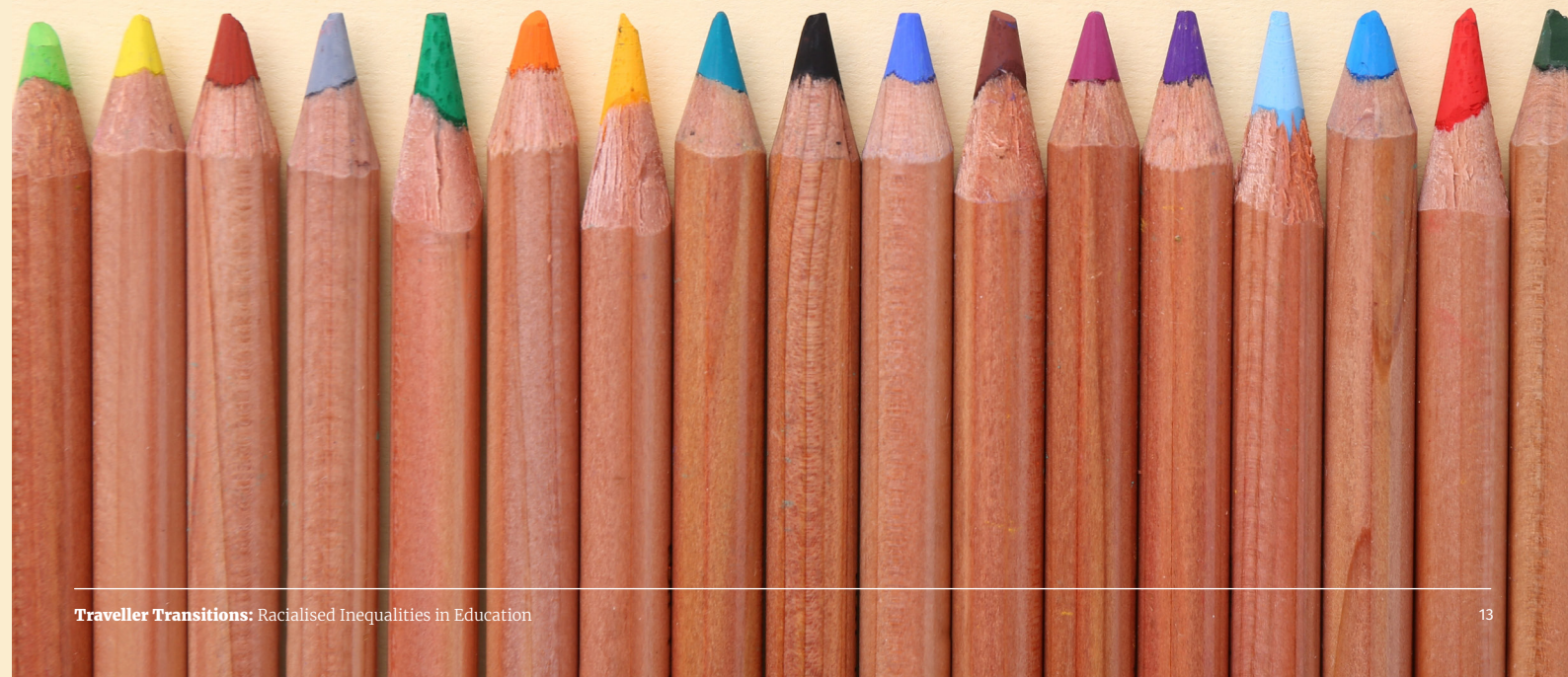
Traveller mothers were caught in a bind between wanting a good education for their children and having to ensure that this did not come at the cost of the young person's emotional wellbeing. The fact that Traveller young people have seven times the suicide rate of the general population of young people is undoubtedly at the forefront of these parents' minds. When school is not a place of affective security, the burden of responsibility for assessing school-based wellbeing fell to the mothers and to individual staff members who expressed empathy for the Traveller young people.

One of the school staff, Melissa, for example, identified the significant need for targeted emotional supports in school:

> **"I just love minding them. Do you know what I mean? Honestly, you just have to wrap them up. They really need us. They need huge emotional support. They're they're children, hurt children. A lot of the time, you know, they're scared. School is scary."**
> *(Melissa, School Staff).*

The hurt expressed by the Traveller children came from their sense of school as a hostile environment where everyday encounters of racism threatened their wellbeing, their capacity to engage and their anxiety about continuing with education

Key Finding 7:	Some schools can be hostile places that cause much hurt and pain for Traveller young people.



Conclusions and Recommendations

This report has provided rich insight into how Traveller young people are navigating the everyday realities of post-primary school life. Traveller young people very often experience school as hostile places of hurt and pain and have mostly negative interactions with their teachers. Practices of ethnic segregation — justified oftentimes on the basis of particular ideals of 'behaviour' — result in feelings of isolation in being separated from the rest of the school population. At the same time, some Traveller young people described school practices that restrict their social interactions with other Travellers at lunchtime or in the classroom, causing them to feel loneliness and engendering negative attitudes towards schooling. Furthermore, Traveller young people experience everyday negative policing of their bodies in ways that subtly privilege particular ideals of bodily comportment and fail to take culture or circumstance into account. These hugely negative experiences on an everyday basis, coupled with the loss of supports in the transition from primary to post-primary school, are undoubtedly linked to the disproportionately high early school leaver rates amongst Traveller young people.

The teachers who took part in this study described an acute awareness of these negative experiences and systems and demonstrated care and empathy. Furthermore, some Traveller children described examples of individual teachers with whom they had positive relationships and experiences of support. However, such experiences rely on the care and empathy of individual teachers. While care and empathy are crucial, the reliance on individual staff members is precarious and very limited, particularly when anti-Traveller racism is so normalised and prevalent across schools and Irish society.

Thus, we end this report with recommendations for policy-makers and schools arising from this research, and we indicate where further research is needed to inform future action.

What can policy-makers do?

- Collaborate with Traveller organizations to provide protocols for school leaders in developing an anti-racist approach to school governance. This should include but not be limited to protocols for ensuring that:
  - Traveller young people are supported in the transition into their school from primary school.
  - ethnic segregation practices are not happening at school.
  - discipline practices are not disproportionately affecting Travellers.
  - practices of inclusion are informed by Traveller young people themselves.

What can schools do?

- Work with local Traveller support organisations and feeder primary schools to develop practices that support Traveller young people in navigating the move from primary to post-primary schools.
- Monitor school practices and ensure that ethnic segregation is not the outcome of disciplining practices or additional needs support structures.
- Ensure that all staff are educated about the experiences of Traveller young people and anti-Traveller racism, for example, through: Traveller culture competency education and training courses, professional accreditation such as UCC's micro-credentials on 'Undoing Traveller Exclusion' and whole-school accreditation initiatives such as the Yellow Flag Programme.
- Ensure staff have access to and engage with resources such as the NCCA Traveller Culture and History Research Report (NCCA 2023) and the Travelling Community Teaching Resource (Collins 2021).

What further research is needed?

- Largescale, national research with Traveller young people is needed to further explore some of the issues raised by this report. First, longitudinal data that captures the educational and social impact of supports in post-primary school is required to build a better understanding of how the education system can tackle the attainment and progression gap for Travellers. Secondly, the continued segregation of Traveller young people, alongside the practice of separating them from friends and kin is a troubling finding that requires greater scrutiny on a larger scale. Thirdly, not enough recognition is given to the emotional experience of schooling and larger scale research is needed to unpack the everyday reality of Traveller young people's lives in schools.

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