



Traveller Equality Project

Irish Chaplaincy in Britain, 50-52 Camden Square, London, NW1 9XB

Statement of Concern Monitoring of Gypsy Romany and Irish Traveller Children in Secure Training Centres

As the Traveller Equality Project, an initiative primarily intended to promote the equitable treatment of Travellers within the criminal justice system in England and Wales we regularly work with prisons, prison staff and prisoners in order to develop cultural awareness, education and mental health opportunities for prisoners from a Traveller background. Our work has been cited positively by the Independent Monitoring Board, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, a ministerial working group and Andrew Selous MP, amongst many other stakeholders. I am writing in regards to the monitoring of Gypsy, Romany and Traveller children in Secure Training Centres.

The recent HM Inspectorate of Prisons / Youth Justice Board report ‘Children in Custody 2014–15: An analysis of 12–18-year-olds’ perceptions of their experience in secure training centres and young offender institutions’, stated:

Both STCs and YOIs continued to hold a hugely disproportionate number of children who described themselves as being from a Traveller or Gypsy background. In STCs, 11% of children told us this – a hundred times greater than the 0.1% which is the estimated proportion in the population as a whole. We have repeatedly raised our concerns about this issue – with any other group such huge disproportionality would have led to more formal inquiry and investigation into what part of their backgrounds or interaction with the criminal justice system had led to this situation. Children from a Traveller background reported greater levels of need and worse experiences in custody than other children.

For a number of years, the Traveller Equality Project has raised our concerns over the experiences of Traveller children in custody. Foremost amongst our requests has been the introduction of monitoring of Gypsy Romany and Traveller children in custody, on the basis that without knowing the numbers of Travellers in custody one cannot address the needs of this grouping. We have written to all STCs and the Youth Justice Board about the pressing need for action on these issues, not least following the February 2014 HMIP report, ‘People in Prison: Gypsies, Romany and Travellers’. In a response dated March 2015, the Youth Justice Board’s Governance Team stated that the ‘YJB does not compile data [sic] on the number of young GRT people in custody’.

In light of the most recent (official) concerns about children in custody and specifically Traveller children in custody, we would like a response to two questions:

- What plans are in place to systematically monitor Gypsy, Romany and Traveller children in Secure Training Centres?
- What plans are in place (and in what timeframe) to address the concerns of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons, Nick Hardwick regarding 'the worse experiences in custody' of children from a Traveller background?

We would aim to get some full and comprehensive answers to this enquiry given the extremely pressing nature of the matter. Indeed, as we have raised this issue repeatedly with all stakeholders over a significant period of time we have legitimate expectations of some progress on the issue.