



## **Roma pupils at Bright Futures Education Trust (Gorton South, Manchester): Background, preliminary observations, engagement strategy**

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### **Background**

Roma migrants from Eastern Europe began settling in Greater Manchester in the mid-1990s. The first groups to arrive were from Poland, the Czech Republic and Lithuania. Roma from Romania began arriving in 2000-2001. Until 2004 they relied on asylum applications to obtain a temporary legal status, but their applications were generally rejected and they were expected to leave the UK. In the run-up to the EU enlargement in 2004, citizens of the new accession countries were allowed to stay. After 2004, Roma from Hungary and Slovakia began to settle in Greater Manchester. The number of Romanian Roma increased gradually in the run up to the second EU enlargement in 2007. Despite steadily growing numbers, the newly settled Roma communities remained dispersed across Greater Manchester and did not come to the attention of the authorities in any significant way. In Bolton, a Roma support group was set up by the council in 2007. It took an inclusive approach and engaged with both local Traveller and English Gypsy communities and with Roma immigrants from Eastern Europe. In Manchester, the City Council's International New Arrivals team provided some support for school registration of Roma children from Romania in the early phase; we understand, however, that at first the service was largely unaware of their Roma ethnicity, culture and language or of their migration history and regarded them simply as Romanian citizens.

Between 2007-2009, several extended families of Roma originating mainly in Ialomița province in southeastern Romania settled in the Gorton South and Longsight areas, forming a community of perhaps up to around 400 persons (of all age

groups).<sup>1</sup> Many local primary schools were reluctant to offer the families support with school registration and there are indications that the City Council's International New Arrivals team adopted a policy of channelling most requests for school places to Gorton Mount Primary Academy (GMPA; until 2012 Gorton Mount Primary School) and to Cedar Mount Academy (CMA; until 2012 Cedar Mount High School), resulting in a noticeable rise in the number of Roma pupils in these schools in 2008. GMA (then Gorton Mount Primary School) held a series of consultations and training sessions with the Romani Project at the University of Manchester in that year and then proceeded with a targeted engagement strategy. It held monthly meetings with Roma parents for a year, which were facilitated by an interpreter, and made an effort to raise staff awareness of the Roma community. The school also invited parents to participate in events held at the school. It appointed a Roma community member as Roma liaison officer and a full-time teacher of Romanian background, who helped communicate with parents and translate letters into Romanian. The school offered a member of the Romani Project staff a PGCE placement and subsequently a full-time job as teacher and later Ethnic Minority Achievement Leader. It also employed additional teachers in Key Stage 2 to target teach small groups of children learning English as an additional language, it introduced additional phonics lessons for Key Stage 2 pupils learning English as an additional language, and sets by ability in years 2 -6, for literacy and maths, to address the full range of abilities in these year groups and help accelerate progress.

At CMA (then Cedar Mount High School), the City Council's International New Arrivals team provided EAL support in 2008-2009, partly outsourced through One Education (and later through Black Health Agency). In the summer of 2009, the Romani Project at the University of Manchester was commissioned by the City Council's Regeneration Department to carry out research on the community of Roma migrants from Romania in Gorton South and to make recommendations for an engagement strategy. Following the circulation of the Romani Project's report in October 2009, the INA team began to take a closer interest in the Roma. It started a series of consultations with Roma pupils at CMA and visited their place of origin in Țândărei in Romania. The activity was documented in a booklet, launched at a showcase event at CMA in June 2010.<sup>2</sup> INA support for Roma at CMA then gradually began to focus more on tracking attendance and dealing with behaviour. The school also made other staff arrangements to engage with Roma: a Modern Foreign Languages teacher was assigned to work with Roma as part of the school's EAL team, and a member of the senior management team was entrusted with managing Roma provisions.

The Romani Project team was invited to visit CMA (then Cedar Mount High School) in September and October 2010. We spoke to teachers and senior man-

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<sup>1</sup> See 'The Romani community in Gorton South, Manchester', Romani Project report from October 2009, commissioned by Manchester City Council  
<http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/downloads/2/report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> 'What's working: conversations with Manchester's Romanian Roma community living in Longsight and Levenshulme', written by Julie Davies and Jane Murphy, Manchester City Council, Children's Services, International New Arrivals, Travellers and Supplementary Schools Team, June 2010.

agement staff and observed classroom interaction. The school had just introduced a Pathway system with the intention of working with Year 7 pupils according to their ability. In practice, however, the Pathway system resulted in a segregation of Roma pupils, and we visited several classes that consisted entirely of Roma. By the end of 2010, the Pathway system had been extended to Years 8 and 9 and as a result many Roma pupils were taken out of mainstream classes and referred to the EAL Pathway. Reports from supply teachers and teaching assistants who worked at CMA supporting EAL provisions at that time indicate that many Roma pupils had very few opportunities to interact with non-Roma pupils in the classroom. An EAL audit carried out at CMA (then Cedar Mount High School) in January 2011 concluded:

“The EAL Pathway is focused upon a Roma cohort ... This Pathway could be interpreted as a withdrawal mechanism in itself. Pupils are then withdrawn from English, Mathematics and Science for small group work. The teachers of this Pathway provision have had no formal training or induction in terms of EAL knowledge, cultural awareness and how Step Descriptors inform the differentiation of lesson planning and target setting.”

This was confirmed by a teacher who was employed by the school in 2010/2011, who told us:

“As teachers, we soon found out that moving pupils out of the Pathway was almost impossible. They had to show very fast progress in English, something which became even harder once they were in the Pathway because they were totally separated from English speakers and it was much more natural for them to speak Romani and Romanian. It certainly became even harder to show progress in Maths and Science.”

Some of the EAL support teachers continued to be paid by the City Council’s INA team, usually through BHA. In October 2010, the Romani Project in partnership with Big Life Group initiated a training course for a small number of young people from the Romanian Roma community, with the aim of training a group of Roma interpreters who would in due course help identify and articulate the community’s needs and support engagement with services. A number of these people were hired in 2011 by the INA team, through BHA, as Roma classroom support workers or ‘mentors’, and they began to work in the EAL Pathway at CMA alongside a Romanian teaching assistant and two Romanian EAL/ESOL teachers.

During one of our team’s visits to CMA (then Cedar Mount High School) in October 2010 we were asked by a member of the school’s senior management team whether the University was in a position to support the exclusion of Roma from the school’s attainment statistics. We understand that since 2010, provisions for Roma pupils have been the subject of discussions and internal memos at CMA and later at Bright Futures Education Trust, and that among the issues addressed was the attainment level of Roma and the cost to the schools of special support for Roma. So far we have had access to just one such report, drafted in the spring of 2013, which cites the work of a PhD student who was loosely connected with our project

and who carried out linguistic research at CMA to assess the spoken English acquired by Roma girls. This report also relies on input from the City Council's INA team, which is cited as advising the school that "[Roma] male and female students are not used to being together" and that therefore "Roma students can be very promiscuous and are very accepting of inappropriate sexualised behaviour from male students". The INA team is further cited as having raised concerns that female Roma pupils leave school at the age of thirteen to "get married back in Romania", that they are caught "begging in Manchester City Centre", and that weddings of female Roma "from the age of eleven" take place at Crowcroft Park.

Currently we have no way to assess the possible impact that such advice may have had on staff's perception of Roma. We are, however, aware that BHA (which had close links and personnel overlap with INA) continued to be contracted by CMA until the summer of 2014 and that they provided part-time staff, paid on an hourly basis, to supervise Roma pupils whose behaviour was considered to be problematic. We are also aware that BHA offered a number of training sessions to staff at CMA, most recently in June 2014, and that during those sessions issues of 'early marriage', 'attendance', and 'safeguarding' were raised and defined as inherently linked to 'Roma culture', a suggestion also made by BHA in a report on an intervention funded by Manchester City Council's Equality Programme, also from June 2014.<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted that Bright Futures Education Trust has not been unique in trying to address issues of attendance and progress of children of Roma immigrant background. Our project team recently had conversations with ESSA Academy in Bolton and Oasis Academy in Oldham, both of which expressed an interest in and a need for special support provisions and staff training on Roma, and we understand that both institutions have hired part-time support staff of English Romani and Romanian Romani background, respectively. At national level, a recent Ofsted report by Mark Sims, originally due for release in September 2014, focused on the challenges of school integration of Eastern European Roma, and the National Contact Point for Roma at the Department for Communities and Local Government, Ian Naysmith, noted in June 2014 that there was a need to learn more about the educational needs and school integration of Roma migrants. These follow a series of reports by various consultants who have addressed similar questions in the past few years,<sup>4</sup> the most recent of which addresses Roma families' engagement with education in Glasgow.<sup>5</sup> We therefore see potential links between the interest expressed by BFET in supporting Roma, and the discussion at national level, and we believe that a cooperation scheme between the Trust and the University would be beneficial not just for the schools and the local community, but that it could also add value to this broader discussion.

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<sup>3</sup> For our evaluation of that report and links to the relevant documents see: <http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/migrom/docs/Evaluation.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> E.g. 'From segregation to Inclusion: Roma Pupils in the UK: A pilot project', by Lucie Fremlova and Heather Ureche, Equality-UK, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> 'Roma families' engagement with education and other services in Glasgow', by Daniela Sime, Giovanna Fassetta, and Michele McClung, University of Strathclyde/ Glasgow City Council, November 2014.

## **The shadowing exercise in spring 2014**

The MigRom project ('The immigration of Romanian Roma to western Europe: Causes, effects and future engagement strategies') was launched in the spring of 2013 for a four-year period with funding from the European Commission's Seventh Framework research programme. The project is a consortium that includes academic partners in the UK, Italy, France, Spain and Romania, as well as Manchester City Council and the European Roma and Traveller Forum, an umbrella organisation of Roma NGOs that is affiliated with the Council of Europe. The project investigates the participation of Roma migrants in the fields of housing, access to services, employment, and education, as well as local authority policies and engagement strategies with Roma migrants and public attitudes to Roma. The consortium also seeks to set new standards of collaboration between researchers, local government, and Roma representation. The individual academic partner projects are all led by senior academics with a track record of research in Romani studies and they each involve specialist junior researchers and Roma research assistants. The partnership with Manchester City Council revolves around the provision of outreach services to the local Roma community, especially those from Romania. To this end, the project employs three outreach workers – two of whom are Roma, one is an EAL teacher of Romanian background – who work closely with the City Council's Regeneration Team. The outreach workers run weekly drop-in sessions and offer a range of support and advice services. They also feed back observations to the research project and the City Council. In this way, practice is guided by evidence and the research is in turn directly informed by the practical outreach work. The project also tries to monitor and assess local authority interventions on Roma and it aims to provide advice for the drafting of evidence-based policy. This latter goal remains constrained, however, by the political framework of the City Council's operations.

The idea of MigRom involvement in the work of Bright Futures Education Trust emerged in a meeting with Dame Dana Ross-Wawrzynski, CEO of BFET, and Carol Powell, Principal of GMPA, in December 2013. Concrete ideas were then put forward in a series of joint meetings with the leadership of GMPA and CMA in the spring of 2014, after which a formal invitation was issued to the project to contribute to staff training and awareness raising, to help raise aspirations among Roma pupils and strengthen links with parents, and to suggest activities that would help support the transition from primary to secondary school. It was agreed to start with a period of classroom observation during which MigRom staff would shadow a number of Roma pupils and teachers whose classes included Roma. Observations were arranged for the summer term 2014. The team shadowed altogether 23 pupils in both schools (see table) who were identified by school staff as Roma and were in most cases also known to the MigRom team members from their own work at the schools or through their contacts with the pupils' families. Three teachers were shadowed at GMPA and six in CMA (Music, Science, Business & ICT, Drama, and Maths). The shadowing process also provided opportunities to observe the interaction of the selected pupils with additional pupils, both in the classroom and during breaks.

CMA			GMPA		
	Girls	Boys		Girls	Boys
Year 7	2	2	Year 2	1	
Year 8	1	2	Year 3	2	
Year 9		2	Year 4	1	1
Year 10	1	2	Year 5	2	
Year 11	1		Year 6	1	2

Number of pupils shadowed during the observation period

In consultation with school staff, the research team put together guidelines for the shadowing process. The purpose of the shadowing exercise was to observe interactions between pupils and between teachers and pupils and to gain more in-depth insights into the views and experiences of both pupils and teachers. This was done by engaging them in casual but guided conversations through which the team members tried as far as possible to address a series of questions (see tables below) without having to rely on a formal elicitation (interview) procedure. Since structured interviews were avoided, it was neither possible nor intended to carry out a systematic comparative survey. Notes were taken during or after these interactions and the data were archived anonymously in line with the project's ethics guidelines. All members of the project team who took part in the shadowing exercise had undergone CRB checks and had received training in research ethics and data protection; they all speak Romani and they have links with the community and were often acquainted with the families of the pupils and sometimes with the pupils themselves.

We relied on the cooperation of teachers who volunteered to take part in the exercise, and consequently it was not possible to shadow all members of staff or even a representative sample. At GMPA, all teachers were informed and agreed in principle to participate. At CMA, with a significantly larger staff cohort, many staff members were unaware of the project, and on one occasion a staff member who had been recommended to the project team by the school leadership preferred not to allow our team member to take part in a class. The observation schedule at CMA was briefly interrupted due to the absence, during part of the observation period, of the contact person who coordinated the exercise on behalf of the school. It was also noted that most of the lessons observed in CMA were foundation subjects and that pupils generally appeared to be more engaged in these lessons. The impressions outlined in this report do not, therefore, pretend to offer either a fully comprehensive or a representative picture of interaction among or with Roma pupils in either of the two schools. Rather, our aim is to point out particular issues and patterns in order to contribute to a somewhat better understanding of the participation of Roma in the school environment.

<b>Guidelines for shadowing pupils</b>
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Questions for pupils:
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Do other pupils make racist comments to you? (details?)
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How do other pupils refer to you and your family? (Romanian, Gypsy, not at all)
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Are you doing well in school? (why, they think they're succeeding/failing)
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Are there classes you don't enjoy? (why?)
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Do you know what level you are working at in maths and English?
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How important is it that you get good levels in school subjects?  
 What helps (or could help) you make progress from one level to the next?  
 Do you have older brothers and sisters? Are they at school (what are they doing if they have left school)?  
 What do pupils think about learning English? What has helped them so far? What would help them even more?  
 What do pupils find difficult/ easy about learning English? Is it speaking, understanding what others say, reading, writing or learning new words?  
 Do pupils think they are learning English in other lessons or only in English lessons?  
 What helps pupils learn English in other lessons?  
 What do pupils do to help themselves learn English faster? Do they spend time talking in English with pupils who do not speak Roma or Romanian? When? How much time? At school? Outside of school?

Environment/Class:  
 Are there displays on the wall to aid learning? Do teachers refer to and make use of these?  
 Is equipment used to aid learning?  
 Have teachers provided materials to "scaffold" learning?  
 How are children grouped in lessons? (in groups/pairs also, by ability/mixed-ability, form group/age)  
 How are lessons organised? (by form group, by ability)

**Guidelines for shadowing staff**

General guidelines:  
 Observe interactions between teachers, teacher - pupils, teacher/parents. No feedback to be given after lesson shadowing. We are not there to assess the quality of teaching.  
 The questions below are to help focus observations and discussions during shadowing. They are not to be elicited one after another in a question/answer session with teachers or pupils.

Questions for teachers:  
 Do the Roma generally do well in school? (why, they do think they're succeeding/failing, examples of both)  
 Do you think Roma pupils think it is important to get good levels in school? (why?) Do you think it is important to their parents?  
 What helps (or could help) children make progress from one level to the next?  
 How does school help pupils learning English? What else might help them to learn English faster?  
 Do Roma pupils learn English as quickly as other pupils with EAL? (if not, why do you think this is?)  
 Do other pupils make racist comments directed at/or about Roma pupils? (details?)  
 How do other pupils refer the Roma? (Romanian, Gypsy, not at all)

Environment/Class:  
 Are there displays on the wall to aid learning? Do teachers refer to and make use of these?  
 Is equipment used to aid learning?  
 Have teachers provided materials to "scaffold" learning?  
 How are children grouped in lessons? (in groups/pairs also, by ability/mixed-ability, form group/age)  
 How are lessons organised? (by form group, by ability)

## Pupils' perception

We found that when asked in general terms about their school experience, pupils tended to have an overall positive attitude to school. For example, a Year 2 pupil was keen to tell us how happy she was to be going to school, and two girls in Year 7 told us that they believed that it is very important to get good grades because this would help them in the future. A Year 10 pupil admitted having problems with some classes but said school was important because it would help him get a job. Although we did not have an opportunity to speak directly to parents and to correlate parents' views with those of the children, judging by the children's self-reporting it seems that they are strongly influenced by parents' attitudes to school and that those attitudes are usually positive: Most of the children said that it was important to do well at school because they knew that this was important for their parents. For example, a Year 9 pupil who had attended GMPA, started in Year 7 at CMA, and stood out in particular in English and Maths, said that it was important for him to show his family that he was making good progress in his education and that this would help him get a place at college. Another Year 9 boy admitted that school was not very important to him but that it was important for his family that he went to school in order to be able to get a good job.

Quite a number of pupils flagged themselves to us as 'success cases'. A Year 3 pupil was proud to report to us that she often answered questions in class that other pupils were unable to answer. A Year 5 pupil reported how he often finished his work before the others. He described how on one occasion a teacher marked his Maths assignment as incorrect, but it turned out that he had solved the problem correctly and the teacher apologised to him for the error. A Year 10 pupil in the Business class said he was enjoying the work and doing very well. The teacher had assigned a temporary TA to help him with the language if needed, but the pupil did not seem to need much help. Where possible we tried to explore links between pupils' current feeling of confidence and satisfaction with their progress, and their school biographies. A Year 8 pupil told us that he had started school in Romania when he was five years old. He came to Manchester and joined Year 3 at GMPA, and after primary school he started Year 7 at CMA. He was very aware of his targets and the level at which he was working. We observed how he completed his Science test with relative ease and we were told that he is one of the most advanced pupils in his set. In English he was very confident and eager to help others in his class and was called upon by the teacher to support other pupils once he completed his work. A Year 8 pupil joined Year 5 at Chapel Street Primary School. She then moved to Old hall Drive Primary School in year 6 and joined CMA in Year 7. She reported proudly that she can write and read very well and that she enjoys all her lessons.

Many pupils appear to take an interest in their own progress. A Year 5 pupil said she started to improve by Year 3 and that she now generally understands the work and can speak better English. She enjoys P.E as well as Maths, but she doesn't like Literacy because it's a bit too much writing. A Year 9 pupil who attended GMPA for three years reported how she felt that her level of English had improved since Year 7, as did her behaviour and her ability to concentrate. A Year 7 pupil who had also spent three years at GMPA reported how she felt relaxed at school and was

confident about her own ability to learn. Many directly articulated their appreciation of personal feedback. Two Year 7 girls acknowledged the support that they received from the English teacher, who helped them to write, read and speak English. At the same time, some pupils expressed frustration about their lack of progress. A number of pupils said that they felt their English was improving but that academically they had felt more confident in Year 7 than in Year 9, their current year. A Year 10 pupil said he felt he was learning more when he first started in the EAL class, but now since he joined the mainstream class he hasn't learned much because he is expected to copy what the teachers write on the board. He complained that he didn't know what level he was at now because he hadn't been told, but said he appreciated teachers' efforts to help him with his work.

When children expressed a preference for one subject or group of subjects over others they often linked this to the degree to which the teacher, in their view, engaged with them directly, either by providing individual feedback, which seemed particularly important to them, or by offering pupils more opportunities to participate actively in class and especially, as they put it, "to say their opinion". At CMA we also observed a higher level of enthusiasm in classes that required more active participation, and more consistent disengagement where teaching was frontal. Year 9 pupils complained about teachers who, in their opinion, did not take the time to explain things to them and merely asked them to copy from the whiteboard. They said that in such situations they did not make an effort to follow the lesson and when asked questions they responded by guessing the answer.

At CMA we found that some pupils make an effort to actively avoid classes in which they feel less comfortable. A Year 7 pupil who had attended GMPA told us how he avoids Geography because he usually "gets into trouble" in that class. A Year 9 pupil said he didn't enjoy History because there was a lot of writing, and he didn't like Science because the teacher was too strict and shouted loudly at the pupils; but the same pupil was doing very well in English and Maths and was motivated to impress his family with his progress. A Year 10 boy said he didn't like R.E because he didn't understand the subject, and he didn't like Science because there was no practical lesson. A Year 9 pupil who started school at Plymouth Grove Primary School in Year 4 and joined CMA in Year 7 said he often avoided going to lessons because the work was hard for him. We observed on one occasion how he refused to stay in a Maths lesson, but when he received personal attention he was able to complete his assignment very quickly. Generally, pupils in Years 7 and 8 seem to be more actively engaged in lessons while those in Years 9 and 10 said they would like to receive good grades but that they felt that some teachers didn't show much interest in helping them.

Irrespective of the extent to which these statements are an accurate representation of typical patterns of classroom interaction, they reveal pupils' willingness in principle to engage in a critical reflection of classroom dynamics, and their intellectual and emotional ability to do so. They also show that pupils' perception of teachers and their teaching methods is not undifferentiated and that it can therefore serve as a useful indicator of some of the potential barriers and difficulties that pupils may face in the classroom. Clearly, there is no general 'Roma attitude' to school.

## Roma as a distinct group

One of the purposes of the observation exercise was to explore any indications that Roma face particular challenges in the school environment, or pose particular challenges, as a group. We must first devote a few lines to explaining to what extent Roma constitute an identifiable 'group'. From the perspective of the Roma themselves, self-identification is primarily with an extended kinship group. The extended household is, in most Roma communities, both the cultural and economic unit around which life is organised. This means that activities such as celebrations, earning, childcare and care for the elderly, purchases of anything from property to household utensils and even groceries, and other forms of mutual support are managed within the extended household. Most Roma immigrants in Manchester arrived here not as individuals or even nuclear families, but in extended families, and retain, as far as possible, the family structures that constitute the core of Romani society.

These structures have a direct impact on the social interactions of Roma pupils in the school environment: Roma immigrant families are generally a young population, as are immigrants in general, though among the Roma there is also a notable absence of elderly family members due to much shorter than average life expectancy among Roma communities in the countries of origin. Roma tend to have large families and since they organise their lives in the extended kinship group, clusters of nuclear families tend to settle together in the same neighbourhood and if possible in immediate proximity to one another. As a result, noticeable groups of Roma children who are related to one another usually attend the same local school. Accustomed to spending most of their social time in the extended family, where socialising usually encompasses all generations, they will tend to form a very tight-knit group in the school environment, too – often more so than pupils of minority or other immigrant backgrounds.

'Belonging' to the Roma community is also manifested through exposure to particular norms of interaction in the family, values regarding honour and shame and the sharing and display of good-fortune and generosity, and more. All these, however, are, as in every community, subject to constant re-negotiation and re-shaping as community members experience new situations. Culture is among the Roma, just like for any other group, not static but dynamic, exposed to external influences and prone to internal mutations. Generalisations about the career preferences, age of marriage, norms of family size, diet, appearance and dress, religiosity, or anything else about Roma risk underestimating the dynamics of constant change and even romanticising or in extreme cases pathologising Roma culture as a set of behaviour norms that is stable and predictable and which therefore conditions the development potential of individuals who are part of the group.

In this connection it is also necessary to emphasise that Roma culture is not inherently connected with Travelling, and that Roma are not Travellers. The association of Roma with Travellers derives from the undifferentiated application of the term 'Gypsy' to a variety of different populations that do not necessarily have any historical, cultural or linguistic ties with one another. This external labelling has received institutional strengthening through the coining of the term 'Gypsy, Roma,

Traveller' (or GRT). This term was introduced initially with reference to the administrative units of the Traveller Education Service, whose remit is often extended to Roma immigrants from Eastern Europe. It has since, however, been used to denote, in a very unrealistic way, the image of a culture that is shared, supposedly, by these various groups. The immigration of Eastern European Roma to the UK is primarily an attempt to escape social and economic hardships and acute marginalisation in the origin countries. As such it partly resembles the arrival of refugees from various crisis regions while also being an integral part of the overall pattern of population mobility from poorer to wealthier countries that makes use of the freedom of movement within an enlarged European Union. Roma migration has therefore nothing at all to do with 'nomadism' or nomadic traditions, and the depiction of symbols like caravans or horses as tokens of their culture is therefore meaningless to most Roma migrants. The extent to which Roma of different background (kinship, location, country) feel an affinity with one another varies, however. In our experience, close connections sometimes develop between Roma of different backgrounds, but they may also develop between Roma and non-Roma. For example, we are aware of a number of Romanian Roma in Manchester who have partners of South Asian origin.

One of the more obvious markers of Roma identity is, on the other hand, the Romani language. Broadly speaking, it is shared by Roma across different kinship groups as well as across regional and national borders. Almost all Roma families are multilingual, and some use both Romani and the majority language of the country of origin (such as Romanian or Czech) as family languages. Some families even show a preference for the majority language (thus, Romanian or Czech) but are still regarded by the Romani-speaking community as Roma on the basis of their ancestry and participation in other shared patterns of social and cultural activities. Nonetheless, the linguistic aspect reinforces a sense of identity, in that interaction in Romani (or another language known to the group) sets the group apart from others. In the case of Romani, the demarcation is exclusive, since the language is only spoken by Roma and by no other population group. A strong sense of language loyalty, which symbolises family loyalty, combined with the fact that most Roma pupils have family relations in the school and often in the classroom, creates a strong potential for a 'congregation effect' whereby Roma pupils form a coherent group that sets itself apart linguistically.

In CMA we noted that teachers have different approaches to the use of Romani in the classroom: Some allowed them to speak in their own language while working in a group to prepare a task, while others tried to enforce a strict ban on the use of other languages. We take the view that is followed by the great majority if not indeed all sociolinguists and educational linguists, which is that imposing penalties on the use of children's first or home language risks blocking their intellectual creativity and their sense of identity and self-confidence, and is in addition discriminatory. Allowing the use of home languages not just when socialising but also during group work offers pupils an opportunity to bridge gaps between school procedures and home culture. To those who are insecure in English, it offers an opportunity to make use of their full communicative resources to engage in intellectual tasks and therefore supports their creativity and participation. Allowing pupils to exhaust their linguistic-communicative repertoire can be managed and optimised by main-

taining an awareness at two distinct levels: First, it is necessary to acknowledge that some pupils have multilingual skills and that these are an asset rather than a hindrance to learning and classroom interaction. This helps avoid the risk of stigmatising pupils for their language repertoire on the one hand, while on the other hand it can break down any sense of language as a defensive barrier. Second, teachers need to understand the special sociolinguistic circumstances and mapping of languages onto various domains of interaction in the Romani setting (as well as in other cultures): Romani is generally not a written language and it is not used in any educational setting. This does not mean that it is a 'deficient' or 'impoverished' language, but it means that for other functions, other languages may play a greater role. For this reason, pupils who interact in Romani while preparing a group task may face difficulties transferring their thoughts into English when asked to report back to the class. A constructive approach would seek to support pupils in this process, rather than try and prevent it and thereby risk disengaging the pupils altogether.

Teachers should also be aware that Romanian, while used in many families of Romanian Roma alongside Romani (note that the two languages are unrelated and the similarity in name is purely coincidental), is for most pupils a second or even third language, and those who have not had any extensive schooling in Romania will find it difficult to use the language for problem-solving tasks and may not even be familiar with basic relevant concepts. Finally, while there is no basis for the assumption that speakers of Romani are in any way 'verbally deprived', it is the case that literacy levels within the Roma community as a whole are generally low and that literacy plays a very marginal role if any in the homes of most Roma pupils. This makes it even more important to offer pupils the opportunity to draw on their oral language skills for problem solving and argumentation, and therefore to grant them recognition of their full language repertoires.

In regard to their linguistic repertoires, as in other respects, Roma pupils are not a uniform group. Among Roma of Romanian origin, literacy skills in Romanian vary considerably depending on the extent of schooling in Romania. Many families have lived in other countries before arriving in the UK, and some pupils have had some (albeit usually very limited) schooling in other languages such as Spanish or Italian. The extent of fluency in Romani varies, too. We have observed that Czech Roma in both schools rarely use Romani with one another though some of them are no doubt able to speak it. Fluency in Romani among Czech Roma varies, with some pupils speaking the language fluently while others appear to be familiar only with a few phrases. In CMA we found that Czech and Romanian Roma generally do not interact during unstructured time. Some limited interactions occur during class time, however. On these occasions, English and Romani are both used, depending on the degree of fluency of the Czech Roma in Romani, but English is used more frequently. Pupils of both backgrounds are without a doubt aware of the shared linguistic heritage, and having the ability to use Romani with one another is clearly meaningful for them.

Some teachers at CMA do not seem to distinguish consistently between nationality (Romanian, Czech, Polish, etc.), ethnicity (Roma) and, to a lesser extent, broader geographical origin (Eastern European). Thus, Roma are often equated with Romanian and sometimes with Eastern European. Roma classroom support workers

(mentors') have reported that on occasion they have been asked to translate for pupils of Eastern European background who were not Roma. Many teachers at CMA not only group all 'Eastern European' pupils as one category but are also unaware that some pupils of Czech background are Roma. In both schools, other pupils usually refer to Roma as nationals of their country of origin ('Romanians', 'Czechs') and to the Romani language as 'Romanian'. Romanian Roma generally refer to Romani as 'Romanian' when speaking in English, partly replicating and thereby at the same time reinforcing outsiders' conflation of the two. The use of self-labelling thus shows an attempt to accommodate to outsiders' perception, but it also shows the complexity of identity. We have encountered alternation of self-identification labels among pupils of other backgrounds as well.<sup>6</sup> For Roma, the absence of one-to-one mapping between ethnicity/language and country of origin adds to the complexity, as does the fact that Roma identity is by comparison difficult to conceptualise in terms of uniform indicators such as culture, language, or territory. Attempts by the INA and BHA between 2011-2013 to produce and disseminate learning materials on 'Roma culture' have not resonated well with pupils and parents partly due to the tendency to simplify Roma identity and to package it in terms of emblematic symbols such as a 'national anthem', 'flag', and an abstract historical narrative, none of which are meaningful to members of the local Roma community. In many of these, Roma are also portrayed as 'Travellers' and the administrative concept 'GRT' is used in a way that suggests that it might refer to a realistic entity, which, as explained above, is not the case. Through the use of such materials in training sessions and continuous informal input to staff, INA/BHA may have thus contributed, to some extent, to nourishing the confusion around Roma identity and culture.

When asked about others' attitudes to Roma as a group, Roma pupils communicate a range of different experiences. A Year 9 pupil was adamant that he did not see any difference between Roma pupils and non-Roma, and many pupils said that they had never experienced overt exclusion by others. A Year 10 pupil reported that when he first started school – we have been unable to ascertain the level or time frame – he was often subjected to abusive comments including the label 'Gypsy' and the suggestion that he should "go back to Romania", but that such comments had now stopped. A Year 9 pupil claimed to have been present at a conversation in a police station during which an officer said: "all Roma from Romania come to this country to do bad things". We were unable to verify the incident, but even if it is not an accurate depiction of the child's own, first-hand experience, it indicates an awareness and in all likelihood also a latent fear of exclusion and intimidation that is without a doubt present in the community despite most pupils' assertion that they have not been victims of exclusion in their immediate school environment. Two Year 7 pupils in fact said that they did not feel equal to others because teachers would shout at them if they talked to one another during the lesson, whereas when English pupils did the same the teachers turned a blind eye. Once again we are unable to verify such claims, but they are indicative of a perception, or at least of an urge to

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<sup>6</sup> See the Multilingual Manchester 'School Language Survey':  
<http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/SchoolLanguageSurvey.pdf>

make use of our presence at the school to voice concerns and perhaps a fear of being excluded.

A curious terminological manifestation of Roma pupils' self-perception is their use of the label 'Gypsoy' as a wholesale reference to those who are not Roma – a kind of symbolic reversal of what is regarded as a demarcation imposed by outsiders. The term had been used by Roma pupils at CMA to refer to non-Roma, usually white British, who were seen as aggressive towards Roma. We know that there was a genuine fear of the 'Gypsoy' among the pupils. The term appeared at a time when Roma families were having their windows broken by white English youth from the neighbourhood. In 2009-2010, neighbourhood issues had spilled over into school life to the point that Roma pupils at CMA had to have certain arrangements for their protection so as not to be attacked by other pupils on their way home at the end of the school day.

Teachers' awareness of and attitudes toward Roma as a distinct cohort appear to vary. At a Year 7 class a teacher pointed out two Roma girls to our team and emphasised that he was proud of their achievements. Another teacher at CMA said that she noticed differences between Roma and other migrants, contrasting Roma's aspirations with those of other migrants and comparing them to those of white British pupils in the school (which we understood to suggest that both Roma and white British pupils have lower aspirations than migrants). She emphasised, however, that this distinction was more pronounced five years ago and that there had been a shift now that Roma pupils were experiencing fewer language difficulties and were more motivated. We heard similar views from another teacher at CMA, who said that Roma pupils did not seem to be as motivated as other migrants and that in this respect they were more like white working class pupils who lacked support at home and did not see school as offering them any particular opportunity. At the same time, like other migrants, Roma pupils might experience some issues with language, although she admitted that this was mostly limited to formal oral registers and writing. However, she had noticed an improvement on both issues, particularly among younger pupils. Another difference she noticed was that older pupils rarely interacted with pupils of other backgrounds while younger ones had such interactions more frequently. One member of staff at CMA felt that at the beginning the school struggled with the Roma, then the situation improved for a while, but now things were getting worse. An EAL teacher indicated that staff at CMA were trying to change their approach to Roma. He said: "We are not just trying to contain the Roma as a group like we used to, but now we look at them individually and assess each child".

### **Classroom dynamics**

The two schools appear to be taking different approaches in regard to integrating pupils who are new arrivals. Children arriving at GMPA with EAL are given a baseline assessment of their maths and literacy ability and their English language skills. They are then placed with a 'buddy' in their class and teachers are expected to take their particular needs into consideration within the class. Children arriving at CMA with little or no English are taught in a separate EAL programme for six weeks. They are

then referred to mainstream classes, though it seems that teachers often ask the EAL Coordinator to take pupils back to the separate EAL programme if they feel that they are having difficulties integrating into the class.

The schools also differ in the degree to which seating arrangements are set and implemented by the teachers. At GMPA teachers allocate seats and children stay in the same seats until they are re-assigned by the teachers. Teachers appear to make an effort to prevent spatial clustering by ethnic background, and pupils thus always interact with other pupils of a variety of backgrounds. In CMA we observed that pupils often have free choice of seating and where this is the case, there is a strong tendency – not just among Roma – toward clustering by ethnic background. This results in frequent use of languages other than English during group work. In addition to the Roma (both Czech and Romanian) we observed a group of Spanish-speaking girls in Year 9 who used their own language. One of the teachers reported that he did not use a fixed seating plan but that he tried to break down ethnic clusters, while on the other hand he sometimes paired pupils of the same background but different attainment levels to allow those who were more advanced to support the others. We observed one class where a partial seating plan was implemented that put EAL and SEN pupils together. One teacher reported on a trial implemented in a Year 8 English class: The Roma pupils tended to sit together and engaged in conversation with one another during the class. The teacher used drama and speaking/ listening activities in order to involve them and to help them interact with the rest of the class. We found that pupils were generally critical of 'ethnic' clustering and appreciative of opportunities to interact with pupils of other backgrounds. A Year 7 pupil who joined GMPA in Year 2 said that it was better if Roma children avoided sitting together so that they could interact with others and improve their English. Nonetheless, where no seating plan is enforced by the teacher, there appears to be strong peer pressure on Roma to join other Roma. The dynamics of congregation are reinforced not just by language but also by the close familiarity of the pupils, most of whom are related to one another and spend much of their time outside school hours together.

The 'congregation effect' also strengthens peer pressure to exploit gaps in discipline, for instance by routinely arriving late to classes, in groups. This is not limited to Roma, and we had the impression that at CMA pupils of all backgrounds often arrive late to classes. A number of pupils whom we shadowed admitted taking advantage of a lax system of monitoring arrival in class to delay their arrival to lessons that they did not enjoy or where they did not like the teachers because they "shouted" or made them copy from the blackboard. During class times it was not unusual to see pupils wandering around the corridors. A number of staff members seem to be entrusted specifically with minding misbehaving pupils. Besides taking wandering pupils back to classes they are regularly called when a pupil is sent out of the classroom as a sanction for misbehaviour. The pupils are of course aware of this: A Year 9 pupil described to us how she had difficulties understanding Science lessons and therefore made an effort to avoid them by "getting lost" in the corridors as long as she could. She reported that some school staff had the job of finding pupils in the corridors and would then "shout" at them and punish them by giving them copying tasks.

GMPA operates a 'positive behaviour management system' for individual pupils and classes, including the issuing of awards and prizes during assemblies and at the end of the school day, as a way of motivating pupils. When pupils persist in misbehaving, the sanction they are subjected to is a self-reflection exercise, so called 'thinking time'. On these occasions pupils are sent to another classroom with a sheet that they have to fill in, with pictures for younger children and phrases for older ones, to explain what they had done, what they should have done, and what they might do to prevent the same from happening again. This seems to be part of an overall 'positive behaviour policy' that is implemented by all members of staff. Pupils are given an opportunity to reflect on their behaviour and on ways to improve it. For children who need them, the school also uses specific therapies involving play, art and horticulture.

In CMA we have not been able to observe a specific policy on behaviour, but individual teachers apply a variety of methods. Some teachers appear to have excellent relationships with pupils and take the time to persuade the children to reflect on the consequences of their behaviour. Other teachers operate a system of warnings and subsequently ask pupils to leave the room if they fail to comply without necessarily explaining to them what was wrong with their behaviour and what the wider implications of such behaviour are for their learning and relationships with other people. We observed two main patterns of reactions among pupils. Those with little previous schooling (almost exclusively Roma) do not understand why they are being warned or asked to leave the class. Those with more schooling experience often defy the warnings deliberately in order to be released from the remaining lesson.

Behaviour issues are often connected to the teaching style employed. Pupils react more positively to a more interactive learning but are less patient when the teaching style is frontal or they are expected to copy material from the whiteboard. Accordingly, we observed that the same pupils behave in a very different way in different classes. Music and Drama classes are often regarded by pupils as "fun" hours with extremely loose discipline. Some pupils admitted that they disengaged in those classes where they knew that they would not be disciplined, while others complained about strict teachers and said they did not like their classes because they imposed strict discipline. Many pupils appeared defiant and declared that they did not care about the consequences of poor behaviour; such attitudes were observed among all groups of pupils, not just Roma. But many Roma pupils also reported good relationships with individual teachers.

### **General remarks and suggestions for engagement**

It is clear from our observations that there is no overall suspicion toward or resentment of school among Roma pupils. Rather, we found that Roma pupils clearly articulated a wish to succeed in school and an appreciation of the importance of school, and that they emphasised that such appreciation was both shared and indeed inspired by their parents and families. Roma pupils are also by and large appreciative of the effort of individual teachers and they are motivated to interact and engage with pupils of other backgrounds. We found no overall feeling of discrimination

among Roma pupils, but among some pupils at CMA we did note awareness and perhaps even a fear that their status as equals is not always firmly protected. We suspect that such fears are fuelled to a large extent by family experiences and historical narratives that are passed on within the family and the Roma community, rather than triggered by specific circumstances in the school. Nevertheless, we believe that one must treat these narratives of recurring, permanent discrimination as part of the family traditions and historical cultural experience that are particular to Roma and that a special effort is therefore required to gain the trust of Roma pupils in the school environment.

From our conversations with pupils it seems that two issues are of uppermost importance to them: being able to feel that they are given equal opportunities, and receiving personal feedback and recognition of their progress. Neither of these, however, has any clear impact on pupils' classroom behaviour. Rather, behaviour seems to relate directly to pupils' awareness of rules and the degree of consistency with which these rules are applied by staff. The absence or inconsistent implementation of rules triggers less predictable, more 'erratic' behaviour. Further, at CMA pupils' behaviour was found to correlate with the style of teaching and the degree to which learning offered opportunities for direct and personal interaction. Roma pupils were invariably more engaged during interactive sessions, when they received direct attention from teachers at a personal level, than in sessions that relied on routine frontal instruction that leaves pupils in a more passive role. Finally, the behaviour of individual pupils at CMA is sensitive to peer-pressure to congregate both within the classroom and, when avoiding classes, in the corridors, and so in effect it is responsive to the opportunities that school procedures offer to congregate, such as loose seating plans and lack of enforcement of punctual arrival to class.

Our team is not in a position to make recommendations on the pedagogical aspects of either school discipline and routines, or the delivery of lessons, or the assessment of language skills or attainment in the various subject areas. Our overall impression so far, however, is that any features that might be attributed distinctively to the Roma community are found to play only a very marginal role in the degree to which pupils successfully engage with the school environment. At most, we believe that some aspects of the social organisation of Roma communities may amplify certain behaviour patterns whose roots are in the school environment itself. Thus the fact that Roma constitute a relatively large and tight-knit cohort of individuals who tend to be family relations may reinforce the 'congregation effect' within the classroom and group wandering in the corridor; but these in turn are products of lax implementation of seating arrangements and punctuality norms, respectively. Similarly, pupils' anxieties about unequal treatment might be interpreted as sensitivity toward the reduced aspirations that some teachers appear to have of Roma and toward what seems to have been, at CMA, an earlier, deliberate school policy of 'containing' Roma (described to us in such terms by some of the teachers).

In spite of such hindrances we found that Roma were keen to engage with teachers and with other pupils of other backgrounds as well as with the learning material, and that they were appreciative of teachers' attention and the feedback that they provided. And we found teachers who recognised Roma pupils' potential and the need to provide personal feedback and who acknowledged that personal en-

agement with pupils and a belief in their potential was a key to successful inclusion and progress in the school environment. In GMPA, we encountered fewer problems of discipline, defiant behaviour by pupils, or fear of unfair treatment. We believe that this can be attributed not just to the more consistent implementation of a clear policy and to the fact that younger pupils are less likely to challenge the norms and teachers' authority, but also to the fact that by now the majority of Roma who join GMPA are no longer new arrivals whose schooling had suffered interruptions, and that they are therefore on a par with all other new entrants. They therefore stand out less as a particular cohort, which in turn gives teachers no grounds to entertain any reduced aspirations in regard to the Roma, thus avoiding the vicious circle whereby pupils' sensitivity to teachers' low expectations of them leads to disengagement.

Based on our recent discussions with the schools' leadership and several staff members we are in a position to make a number of suggestions in regard to our team's involvement in the schools' efforts to support Roma.

First, we believe that the **shadowing exercise** has offered some valuable insights, and we would like to extend it for a further period covering the winter and spring terms in 2015.

At CMA, there is still a lack of clear understanding of the Roma community among some school staff. This stems from a series of factors: There are few social contacts with Roma neighbours (though some teachers reported that they do interact with neighbours who are Roma), apart from support workers and 'mentors' of Roma background (though we are aware of at least one staff member of English Gypsy/Traveller background), reliable information on Roma is not easily accessible, Roma identity is often more difficult to conceptualise owing to territorial dispersion, variation in language and customs, and conflation with traditional and often romantic images, and some members of staff will have been exposed to information provided in the past by INA/BHA which may have unnecessarily created suspicions and biased expectations from Roma. For all these reasons, staff know less about Roma, potentially, than about pupils of other backgrounds, and so in this respect Roma pupils are disadvantaged. Coupled with the particular sensitivities among Roma and constant fear of exclusion, this is an issue that, in our view, requires strategic attention. We believe that the best way to promote greater awareness of Roma is not primarily through staff training (although our team would be happy to engage in such an activity, too) but that better value can be obtained from face to face encounters of parents and teachers, with the participation of pupils. Such a **parent-teacher forum** would serve multiple purposes: It would offer parents an opportunity to be more involved in their children's education and more aware of school routines. It would offer parents and pupils a space to receive the personal attention and feedback that we identified as being important to Roma pupils. And it would help break down potential barriers. Since many parents have children in both schools, a joint forum would make sense and could also make a positive contribution to managing the transition between the schools. This would also support both schools' role as centres of engagement for the local community.

Another way of raising awareness of Roma culture and reassuring Roma that their status as equals is protected, is celebrating culture in the classroom. Isolated efforts by the INA and BHA to introduce 'Roma cultural content' into Manchester

schools have taken on a somewhat awkward approach, as described above. Notwithstanding the good intentions, we regard the attempt to compose a 'cultural narrative' as problematic, since it risks remaining detached from the everyday experiences and even values of Roma pupils and their families. We regard language, on the other hand, as a more tangible, more easily recognisable, and more meaningful aspect of cultural identity. We would like to put our expertise in language and the learning resources on Romani which the Romani Project has produced over the past decade to use in the classroom, by organising **Language Mosaic** sessions. These would be devoted not just to Romani, but to the full picture of language diversity at the schools, including aspects of local English. In conjunction with the University's Multilingual Manchester project, we propose to involve student volunteers in drafting and implementing classroom activities around the topic of the spoken and written word, which will include, on an equal footing, consideration of Romani. We also embrace the suggestion to involve the schools' multilingual staff members.

The MigRom project has been encouraging a group of young members of the Roma community to engage with City Council officials and other community groups and to have a positive inspirational influence on young people in their community. The group has so far initiated the litter-picking activity that took place in November 2014 in Longsight, Levenshulme and Gorton South and has held a series of meetings with local councillors, including a plenary of elected members and council officers from the three wards to discuss Roma-related policy, at Town Hall. We believe that the group can play a role in the parent-teacher forum. The group has also begun to work together with University of Manchester students on a small-scale research project to compile **school biographies** of Roma who have recently left secondary school in Manchester. The compilation can offer further insights into Roma pupils' perspective on the process of school integration and identify success stories of early career starts or even just career aspirations among Roma who are school leavers. This project will receive full supervision from the MigRom team and will not require direct logistic involvement of the schools, but the material will be made accessible to the schools and can be showcased selectively to pupils, parents and teachers, combined perhaps with a series of showcase events at the schools to which the interviewees and young members of the Roma community would contribute.

Another MigRom activity, currently at an initial stage, involves the promotion of **child care** in respect of both the availability of facilities that can cater to the needs of the Roma community, and awareness of such facilities in the community. We see this as an integral part of an overall effort to support education in the community and to strengthen parents' confidence in education institutions, and would like to involve both schools in our efforts, which we have so far been pursuing together with Manchester City Council's Regeneration Team and Sure Start/ Big Life Group.

Finally, we come back to the idea of setting up a **connecting classrooms** activity – a closed and monitored online forum that would allow Roma pupils to connect with other Roma pupils in schools in other parts of the country and abroad. The idea was first raised during a visit at GMPA by Angelina Dimitri-Taikon and Michael Demeter, directors of the Roma Kulturklass in Stockholm, in November 2013. The

MigRom project will be able to initiate a pilot together with the Roma Kulturklass, which could gradually then be extended to other partner schools. The IT aspects will need to be coordinated with the schools.

Activity	Milestones
Shadowing exercise	Schools to nominate staff member as contact person; schools to design a shadowing schedule; MigRom team to produce a follow-up report by July 2015
Parent-teacher forum	Schools to nominate staff member as contact person; schools to identify staff participants; MigRom team to identify parent participants and support agenda and interpreting; first pilot session to take place before half-term break 2015.
Language Mosaic	MigRom to liaise with Multilingual Manchester project manager, who will draft call for student volunteers for spring semester 2015; pilot classroom event to take place at each of the two schools before Easter break 2015.
School biographies	preparation already underway; showcase event to be co-ordinated with the schools after Easter 2015
Connecting classrooms	MigRom to contact Roma Kulturklass and to explore IT aspects; schools to nominate contact person for activity; forum to be trialled in summer term 2015

Proposed activities and related milestones

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