

Traveller Education Support Service (TESS)

Traveller Attendance and Transition Matters Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and replies for Schools:

The TESS information notes offer some direction as regards managing problematic attendance, enrolment and transition issues.

1. What should a school do when a Traveller family has been offered and accepted a place, but the child fails to turn up?

In this instance TESS would advise the following:

1. If the child has not arrived a week after the due date of commencement, all efforts should be made to contact the parent or guardian. TESS staff are willing to help schools in these efforts.
2. EWS (Education Welfare Service) may make information requests to partner agencies if you have a possible location.
3. TESS advises that removing a pupil from the register can only be done if the DE protocols (SA1) have been met under DE Circular 2015/02 (Attendance Guidance and Absence Recording by Schools).

NB A “new child”, who has never attended at least one day, should not be on the school register in the first instance.

2. What should we do a Traveller child who has been attending regularly leaves the area without notice? (This may have been due to particular family circumstances). The school has no working contact numbers and no known whereabouts for the family.

In this instance TESS would advise the following:

1. Schools should try to initiate contact with family by implementing its own attendance policy.
2. Consider contacting extended family members using other contacts named on the pupil profile data.
3. As part of this process, schools may choose to liaise with TESS or other Traveller Support Organisations.
4. If unsuccessful, the case can be referred to EWS as they may make information requests to colleagues across Ireland and Great Britain.
5. Following on the implementation of the above process with no positive outcome in terms of locating the family, then the place can be reallocated only if the DE protocols (SA1) have been met under DE Circular 2015/02 (Attendance Guidance and Absence Recording by Schools).

3. What should we do when a Traveller child fails to return to school after they have been away travelling. The family had contacted the school to say they would be returning in a few months?

In this instance TESS would advise the following:

1. The Principal or Attendance Coordinator should refer the matter to EWS;
2. EWS may initiate information requests to colleagues in Ireland and Great Britain and let the Principal know the outcome;
3. Following this, the school may consider referring the matter to the Board of Governors (BOG). The Principal may withdraw the child's name from the school register if the DE protocols (SA1) have been met under DE Circular 2015/02.
4. Should the family return to the area they must reapply for a place in the school in the normal manner.

4. What can we do when a Traveller parent contacts the school to say they are all leaving the N.I. jurisdiction to go 'travelling' and are not returning. No forwarding address has been given.

In this instance TESS would advise the following:

1. The school has in fact been informed that the family "intend" to leave the jurisdiction. This is reasonable grounds for removing the child's name from the school register only if the DE protocols (SA1) have been met under DE Circular 2015/02 (Attendance Guidance and Absence Recording by Schools).
2. The Principal should issue a Certificate of Attendance on the day he/she has been informed of the departure and withdraw the child's name from the school register the same day. The certificate should be issued directly to the parent, preferably in person. If this is not possible then issue to the parent's home address or new forwarding address (if you have it).

**5. What should the school do if a Traveller parent decides to take an extended holidays and the child is not in school?
e.g. we have information that the family is in a holiday resort or attending a horse fair in other part of Ireland or the U.K.**

In this instance TESS would advise the following:

1. The school's attendance policy should be shared and clarified with all parents whose children are coming to school – either Primary or Post Primary. It should be pointed out that extended holidays for lengthy periods are not approved and are considered as unauthorised absences;
2. The matter should be referred to EWS;
3. Holidays leave is not a reason for removing a child's name from the school's register;
4. The school is obliged to retain a child's name on the register;
5. Internal audit does not encourage schools to remove a pupils name from the register unless it is clear that the child is attending school elsewhere or the child is no longer of statutory school age.

The examples do not include instances when the school's designated person for child protection is obliged to make a referral to Child Protection, their local Health Trust or the PSNI.

Further information and guidance may be obtained from the **DE Circular "Attendance Guidance and Absence Recording for Schools Feb 2015" (Circular 2015/02)**.

Contact can also be made with your local regional Chief Educational Welfare Officer (see www.eani.org.uk/ews or www.eani.org/tess)



Traveller Education Support Service (TESS)

Tullygally Regional Centre,

21 Meadowbrook Road,

Craigavon,

Co Armagh

BT65 5EP

www.eani.org.uk/tess