



**The Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith
Minister for Skills**

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The Baroness Whitaker

By email: contactholmemb@parliament.uk

26 November 2024

Dear Janet,

Further to the Home Education Registration and Support Bill second reading debate on 15th November, I'd like to thank you for your questions and write to you to provide more information on support for children and families in the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) Community, particularly those who are home educating.

Every child, regardless of their background or family circumstances, deserves the opportunity to progress and succeed. We recognise the issues faced by GRT children and young people – and how education can make a positive difference.

As mentioned during the debate, my department's GRT stakeholder group continues to inform the department's thinking, policy and delivery so that GRT children and young people can fully reap the benefits of our Opportunity Mission reforms, and the barriers they face are addressed.

Out of school learning was discussed at the 12th July GRT stakeholder group meeting and group members were invited to submit any related questions or concerns they had on this subject to the secretariat to be passed onto relevant teams for consideration and a response.

Engaging with the Department for Education to ensure wider policies contribute to improving attainment for GRT children and young people is a key area of interest for the group and ensuring the best possible education for the many GRT who do not attend school can lead to better outcomes across these communities.

On your question about support for Open Doors Education and Training's distance learning scheme, this scheme was previously funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) (now the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government). As part of a wider package of post-pandemic support, in 2021/22 DLUHC partnered with Bradford, Central Bedfordshire, Essex, Hillingdon, and Surrey local authorities and Open Doors Education and Training organisation to deliver the £1.4m programme. This programme provided a wide range of targeted support for pre-school children, pupils in primary school and those transitioning to secondary school thereby reducing drop-out rates, supporting young people not in education, employment or training.

This programme also helped adults needing literacy support and improved teachers' cultural understanding and knowledge of GRT communities.

Over 600 GRT children and young people, 150 schools, over 100 staff members and local authorities were supported and reached during the lifespan of the programme. It is now a matter for the local authorities to determine how they will mainstream the lessons learnt, provide sustainable support to the GRT community in their areas and share knowledge with other local authorities.

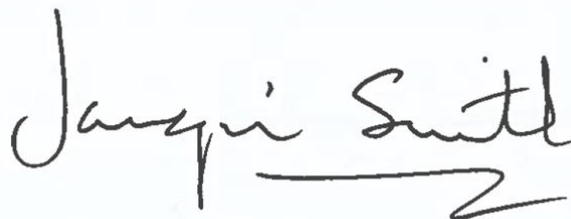
While the Department for Education currently has no plans to enter a new funding partnership with Open Doors Education and Training, we are committed to ensuring that all children and young people have access to a high standard of education and resources to support this. The Department funds Oak National Academy which gives children and families access to free and adaptable high-quality digital curriculum resources to support improved pupil outcomes and a remote education contingency.

Parents and pupils are free to use Oak's resources outside of the classroom. The level of supervision needed has been designed to be minimal (dependant on the individual child), and each lesson will have a pre-recorded video that guides children and parents through each section step-by-step, making it a useful resource for all home educated children including those in the GRT community.

As I mentioned in the debate, the government has committed to introducing a duty on local authorities to support home educating children (should their parents request it) as part of the Children Not in School proposals to be introduced in the future Children's Wellbeing Bill. Where currently no such duty exists, this will ensure that more children benefit from support and advice to promote their education.

Thank you for raising this matter; and I look forward to continuing to discuss how the government's Children Not in School proposals can benefit the GRT community following introduction of the Children's Wellbeing Bill. A copy of this letter will be deposited in the House Library.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jacqui Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the bottom.

**The Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith
Minister for Skills**