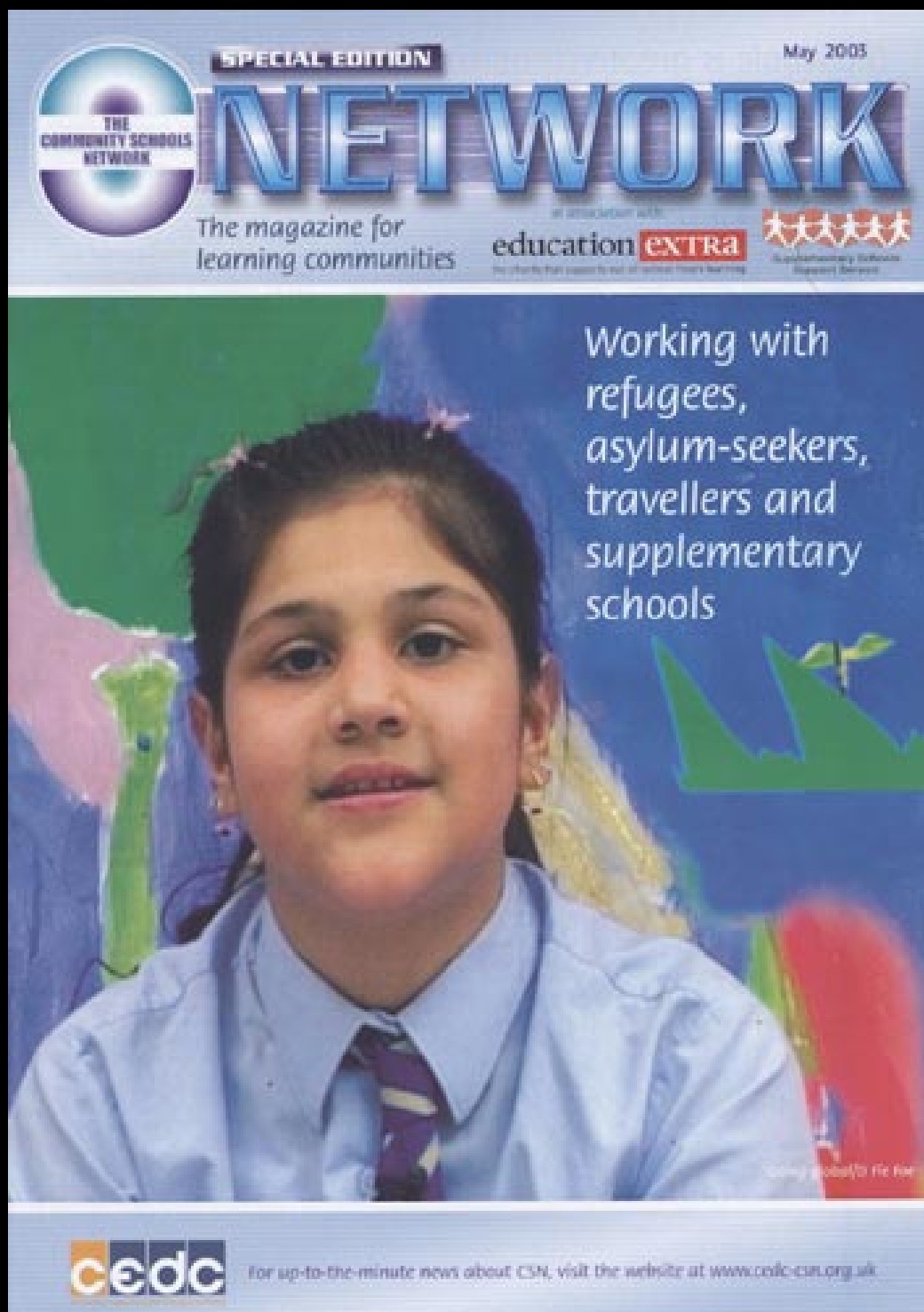


Network magazine

Flagship magazine for community schools
published by ContinYou (formerly CEDC)

May 2003 edition

Full colour A4 16 pages



Travellers – a learning journey

In my role as a member of the team of consultants working within the Schools Plus initiative, I was asked by a school in south London to look at some ways in which they might take their existing work with Traveller families further and make it more effective. Thus, I embarked on a learning journey that was both to sadden me, as I learnt of the horrific ways in which Traveller communities have been treated over the years, and to excite me, as I learnt of all the positive, encouraging educational work that was being done to reach such communities. My brief was to tackle issues about extending the horizons of children with a Traveller heritage, especially boys. These Traveller heritage families are more static than most; they have put down some residential roots in the area, while retaining a sense of their own historical roots.



Kora's red bus, as featured in www.gypsy-traveller-cyberpilots.org

The school was already working in close collaboration with the local Traveller Education Service (TES) and had done much to ensure the successful and lasting integration of pupils from a range of backgrounds, including those of Traveller heritage. Because of the work already being undertaken, my brief was specifically to look wider and find ideas from elsewhere. I discovered that a great deal of exciting and imaginative work was being done around the country. I looked for examples of work which tackled low self-esteem, addressed the learning needs of pupils (especially with regard to literacy), focused on the motivation of boys, involved Traveller families in activities, and aimed to establish a fully inclusive school ethos/code of conduct. The following provides an overview of the information I gathered from the research.

Tackling low self-esteem

York TES set up a one-year project working with the parents of early years children, to show them ways of supporting their children's learning at home. As a result, they produced *Early years: Traveller children learning at home and school*. They found that at primary school age they were more likely to be successful in improving children's

attendance and behaviour if they worked with them between the ages of 7 and 9, rather than from the age of 6. They have demonstrated to schools that Travellers can learn if the teaching methods address their needs.

York TES has also worked in partnership with secondary schools in order to increase the range of qualifications for Traveller pupils who are not expected to get GCSE grades A to C. It keeps them in education and enables them to gain access to further education and employment opportunities. It gives positive 'can-do' messages to younger, disaffected Traveller students. Most of this work has been done with girls. They are also working with a small group of non-mobile girls who do not attend school, but whose parents have agreed for them to be registered with the Pupil Support Centre. They attend a weekly session at a family centre and it is hoped that the girls will eventually become involved in school sessions.

Addressing learning needs

One primary school in York put in a bid for Inclusion funding by focusing on multi-cultural inclusion. It is now providing culturally-themed reading

resources for the National Literacy Strategy in each year group, with help from the local TES. The primary school also worked with a member of the TES team and in direct consultation with parents in order to provide distance learning packs for the few pupils who do travel.

Motivating boys and involving fathers

York TES works with fathers specifically in order to tell them how well their children are doing. They work more closely with the mothers when things are going less than well! One school has hired one of the fathers to do one-off building jobs for them. Another dad has become very involved in early years provision for his children. The playgroup seek him out for his advice and opinions.

Involving Traveller families

Thames Valley Consortium Traveller Education Service recommend that any family learning provision needs to be flexible enough to allow it to take place off-site and not in the evening. The service provides a very basic information sheet on its website (www.rbwm.gov.uk/learning/about_travellers.htm)

The Advisory Council for the Education of Romany and other Travellers (ACERT) advises that schools should offer outreach to the community they serve, rather than expect the community to 'come in' to the school. Even when Travellers stop travelling, they retain their culture and that culture is very strong. ACERT also advises that all school staff – including secretaries, ancillaries, caretakers, and so on – should receive training on the culture and heritage of Travellers.

Establishing an inclusive school ethos

Kent National Grid for Learning (NGfL) provide a very useful list of resource materials which will help to give Traveller-related issues and culture a higher, more 'respectable' status within the curriculum.

Supplementary schools: widening opportunities

'Supplementary schools are not just about teaching kids – they are about building communities.'

Community Development Initiative Supplementary School, Manchester

Supplementary schools have been in existence since the 1960s, providing support for families from black and minority ethnic communities in response to the demand from parents. The rapid growth in the number of supplementary schools in recent years has created an enormous and largely untapped community resource. Since 2001 the Supplementary Schools Support Service (S4), a DfES-funded pilot project, has been working to further partnership collaboration between supplementary and mainstream schools and to enable local communities to gain access to wider educational opportunities. The Support Service currently works in Birmingham, Bristol and Manchester. In this article Chris Blythe, S4 Programme Manager, summarises the characteristics of supplementary schools, to show the potential for inclusion in regeneration strategies, and to recommend strategies that should be put in place to offer further support to supplementary schools.

Characteristics of supplementary schools

A review of grant applications made to S4 in 2001 showed that:

- 50% have charity status (a fifth are limited companies).
- The average age of an organisation is ten years.
- Supplementary schools tend to work with one ethnic group and to provide one kind of activity – for example, a Saturday school, a homework club, a sports project.
- Supplementary schools work with all school-age groups in equal proportions.
- The average project cost in the funding applications round was £6,500.
- In common with other voluntary sector organisations, there is a heavy reliance on volunteers. 70% of the staff in project applications were volunteers, with only 6% being full-time staff.

The potential of supplementary schools

Supplementary schools are diverse organisations, with many strengths. They are:

- tried and tested
- adaptable, with the ability to reflect and respond to community needs
- well-positioned to receive targeted funding
- willing to work in partnership with mainstream schools
- keen to complement mainstream schools
- trusted by parents and the community
- supported by the commitment of staff and volunteers.

Supplementary schools also have great potential, especially in the field of neighbourhood renewal. There are ample opportunities for development and partnership with other learning agencies, business enterprises and renewal organisations, such as Connexions, the Active Communities Unit, the Leadership Incentive Grant, Excellence in Cities/ Gifted and Talented, Local Government Compact, Learning Skills Councils and the London Challenge.

Recommendations

In the light of the experience of past years, we feel that there are important recommendations for the future. S4 is a short-term strategy, funded by the DfES, and it is important to ensure there are long-lasting changes as a result of its work. The potential for supplementary schools to contribute to social regeneration is clear, but few supplementary schools will succeed unless there is continued development of their capacity and advocacy of the schools and their partners. A move away from grant funding towards contracts with partners would enable greater parity of status between supplementary schools and other agencies. Supplementary schools would be in a better position to identify business opportunities and to run activities with clear objectives and fairer rates for the work. However, if they are to do this, supplementary schools should be clear about their own future goals. A successful school will regularly evaluate its 'mission', and its aims and values, considering how they fit with national and local regeneration strategies. Furthermore, supplementary schools should present their services more strongly, focusing on what they can contribute and how this meets the aims and objectives of different funding bodies and business opportunities.

There also needs to be continued advocacy of the role of supplementary schools to key decision-making bodies and potential partners. People need to know about supplementary schools – not just what they can offer, but also the support they need in developing successful partnerships and projects.

There should be a stronger political will from central government to include supplementary schools in national regeneration strategies. For example, each secondary school should be encouraged to work with a supplementary school, where possible. OFSTED inspections of schools and LEAs should include reference to community inclusion in education provision. Each LEA should appoint an officer to provide specific support for supplementary schools.

Finally, resources should be identified to enable more self-help within the supplementary school sector – who better to provide support than those who have managed supplementary schools? If the best supplementary schools acted as professional development hubs, there would be benefits in creating new business opportunities for these schools while developing appropriate local support for other supplementary schools.

Chris Blythe is Programme Manager, CfBT, Teaching and Learning Division.



**Supplementary Schools
Support Service**