**INTERVIEW**

**Attendees**

Interviewer NF

Headteacher G. HT G

NF This back up here, this one, here we go. Yeah, so yeah, just for the recording if you can just say your name and what your role is and which school.

HT G Of course, yeah, so my name’s HT G. I’m headteacher at School G Primary School, yeah.

NF Great, and I think do you have any questions about the project before we start or any questions of me about anything that you want?

HT G I don’t think so no, if I can ask questions as and when they come up as we go through if that’s alright yeah.

NF Yeah. And we’ll go through something at the end of that, about sort of clarifying next steps as it were if you want to take them. But yeah. So, you’re aware that the project was kind of set up originally as kind of EAL, but EMTAS T2 was really keen that we also embraced GRT or traveller and showman children as she is now preferring to refer to them. So, and I’ve interviewed a couple of other schools that have traveller and showman children, and it is really interesting the way in which the two groups have, they’re very, very different identities obviously, but kind of shared background, so that’s the kind of, what we’re getting at. So can you talk to me about, I don’t know School G well. I know the place because I live in (name), but I don’t know the school. So, talk to me about the kind of backgrounds to the GRT children in the school.

HT G Yeah sure. So, we’re a small school and we’ve got 86 children on roll at the moment. We have about 25% of our school is traveller children. I’m just going to load.

NF That’s big, isn’t it? I didn’t realise it was so high.

HT G Yeah, no it is quite big, so we’ve got yeah, 22 of our children are traveller children so its 26%. We take predominantly traveller children come from (name) which is based just up the A33 from where we are. But we also take children from (name) as well, which is another sort of much smaller traveller site, and we have one of our traveller families who are sort of permanently based in the village as well. The majority of traveller children that we have in the school are Irish travellers, but we do have some Romany and some gypsy families as well. So, we don’t have at the moment any showman or boatmen. But yeah, that’s sort of our general make up.

NF So is that quite a fluid population or are there quite a lot of families who are now housed and staying more permanently in the area?

HT G It seems to be at the moment fairly stable. Our numbers really do fluctuate. So earlier on this year we were up at 105 children on roll and now we’re 86 on roll. So, within the year 20 children have moved on, 10 of which were traveller families who moved on. The shortest we’ve had a traveller family with us is a week, and they had two days attendance during that week, and then moved on, and began travelling again. But actually, some of our traveller children, I’ve been at the school for just over five years now, and some of our traveller children who are with us now have been with us for that length of time as well.

As a school we’ve worked really hard to establish really good solid relationships with our traveller families, for us that’s really, really important and so when OFSTED came in nearly two years ago now, and they said, “Oh what was the impact of COVID?” And instead of going into all of the nonsense that happened, I actually said “Well what it did for us was it meant that every single day we could go down to carousel park and visit our traveller families and offer support, offer food packages…” And actually, we then became a really trusted establishment within the communities. At the time we had much fewer traveller families and actually as we became more trusted and more people moved into the area with children, we then became sort of school that they were happy to send their children to, which we take as a real compliment.

NF Yeah, your kind of the go to school, the magnet school as it were.

HT G Yeah, and actually lots of the children who join us, join us having never been to school before. So, we have to take joiners in in every single year group, like last year for example we had a child join us in year 6 who’d never been in school before. So, it was very much academically a year R level, so it creates a challenge for teachers there, because of the spread and the ability that they have. But actually, we see it, as I say we see it as a real privilege that every child who does join us that parents think would be somewhere that they can entrust their children to.

NF Absolutely. So that’s a really interesting make up in terms of the school, isn’t it? And I wonder, just coming to the next question, which is about school development planning, the school improvement planning, do you have kind of objectives within your school improvement plan that are specifically for traveller children, or do you meet them more through kind of quality first teaching? How does it work, planning needs?

HT G If you read my school improvement plan you wouldn’t be able to identify targets for GRT in there. If you read it through my eye, you would. So, for example, my top two targets throughout this year were around raising attainment in maths and writing. And we book ended, here it was four, so we said for our lowest attaining children who are working below their year group level, and for our highest children who were working, who we want to achieve greater depth. Now actually that group there are our lowest children who are working below their year group level is predominantly our GRT children, but we don’t specify them in our school improvement planning, as this is just for our GRT children, because actually this is good practice for all children. And there may be other children who are not GRT who are working below their year group expectation. Such as, we’ve got a Ukrainian refugee who’s working quite significantly below the year group expectation, so she sort of is part of that grouping as well. There is probably one target that’s always a standout one that probably everybody could pick out as GRT which is raising attendance for our most vulnerable children, to be in line with national statistics, or better. And that tends to be a bit of a standing agenda on my school improvement planning, because you know, for our traveller children, and again when I report my data to governors, I very much report it as traveller and non-traveller. So nationally and again, correct me if I’m wrong, but the latest statistic that I’ve got that I can work on, is approximately 75% for GRT children for attendance.

NF So as an average attendance.

HT G As an average attendance nationally. I always work on that as my base line and I say if we’re higher than 75% then we’re higher nationally, I’m happy. That doesn’t mean that I don’t expect my traveller children to be 90+, 95+, but actually 75% is a good sort of working base line for us to go with. So that sort of forms, yeah, part of the school improvement planning in there as well. But then other bits is just sort of yeah, it’s just good classroom practice… Hang on a sec, I’ve got a knock at the door.

NF That’s alright, no worries.

HT G Sorry, again joy of being a small school, normally I will get a knock at my door in the next hour.

NF I’m well used to it, don’t worry. And I used to be in your shoes a long time ago, so total sympathy, yes, don’t worry about it.

HT G But then, so something else that we have developed for this year, we made up this booklet this year, a record of, for the purposes of the transcription it’s our 100 things to do at School G. And within that we sort of first got all the experiences that we wanted the children to do. And so again what we’ve done is really broken that down and that was part of school improvement planning was where that came from, but actually as we were doing it, we were really thinking about our GRT children and going, well, what experiences do they need, in order to be able to access learning and access. So, for example, going to the beach is one of our year R ones, so we take them down to Bournemouth beach and for our GRT parents going on a trip is a really, really big deal and is a really scary thing for them to do. And as I say we do all that we possibly can and so encourage and support our GRT children to come along to the beach. Because actually then when they come back, they can write about it, and they can experience kind of the water area, they can turn into the beach, it becomes that learning as opposed to sort of just wondering what it would be like. And actually, the majority of our GRT children hadn’t been to a beach before. So, they had that experience, so this year we took one of our mum’s along, one of our GRT mums came along as well and because she was coming, all of the other children who were GRT were allowed to come as well. So just little simple bits like that make a really big difference.

NF Yeah, sure.

HT G Sort of going back to that trust element, because we built up that trust with our families over a number of years, we took our year 5, 6’s up to London a week and a half ago. No, this time last week it was, and went to the Frameless Art Gallery, we went to Hyde Park, we then went to Chinatown for dinner and went to see The Lion King. And got back at five past midnight. And there was three GRT children in that class, we get through lots of conversations, lots of explaining what we’re going to do, all sent their children which was incredible. That’s just such a huge step and a huge advance from “Actually no, I’m not even going to send my child to get on a coach.” So yes, you can have them in London all day. Yeah. Sorry, I told you I was going to waffle.

NF It’s alright, just, no, I’m finding it fascinating because I don’t know so much about this particular community so I, yeah, I’ve had the conversation with School L as well. It’s absolutely fascinating. I mean in terms of who’s supporting them in school, do they kind of, I think you mentioned (name). Is there somebody apart from yourself, obviously in a small staff it’s hard, who’s got a kind of GRT remit or do they get LSE support or anything?

HT G So one of the things that we, we have identified sort of, like within last year and this year is that our children, particularly our year 3, 4 children who were working perhaps at year 1 level were finding it really difficult to access the curriculum within their class. So last year we trialled the children in year 3, 4 joining the year 1, 2, class because we had a really strong class teacher in there, and again it was predominantly our GRT children who did that, and because they were learning at a year 1, 2 level. We had conversations then with the LLP and we were saying are we limiting the children in the amount of learning that they’re going to do, because they’re a year four child and they’re only able to access up to a year 2 level. We had to back and forth with that. But actually, we had sort of a much bigger influx into our year 3, 4 class this year. And so, in November appointed an HLTA who set up what we called our rainbow room in here. So, she works with, started out as a group of 8, it’s now a group of 7 children, who it’s 6 GRT, one EAL, and she teaches them maths and English in the morning. She plans individually for them, separate to the class teacher, which is a model that we stole a little bit from (name of other school), I don’t know if you’ve done any conversations with them?

NF No.

HT G Yes, it’s (name), I can't remember his surname. I mean I had a look at his school, and he said yeah, this is what we do. We tweaked his model slightly, because he has the class teacher planned for the HLTA and the HLTA delivers it. I said to my HLTA, “You plan it.” Because you’re more than capable of doing it, so she plans and delivers maths and English for them. And that’s been really, really successful, and then (name of teacher) within school as well who works predominantly in year 5, 6 has taken on sort of some of that, yeah lots of our traveller work that we do then as well.

NF Great, okay, so there’s a lot of support they get.

HT G Well yeah, I’d say sort of between the three of us in school that’s sort of the level of support they get, and then we have support from EMTAS outside as well. So yeah, (name) comes in and does the work that he does, and then we have (name) and (name) come in and do coffee mornings or coffee afternoons, it tends to be because that’s a better time for us, which yeah, which is good as well.

NF Great, yeah. So, there’s a question here which says what you would say are the successes and challenges and I think in a way you’ve actually covered all that. You’ve talked about what you do that works so well and the main challenges is attendance then. Are there challenges apart from that?

HT G Yes. I don’t know, again other schools may have spoken to you about it. But the, for us this year a big clash has been our relationships education. So, our GRT… so to give you the scenario and again I don’t know if you want this in the transcript.

NF Don’t worry about, don’t worry about anything like that.

HT G You can scrap it if you don’t want it or if it creates too many problems. We had a transgender teacher who came into the school on a supply day and gave an explanation as to sort of who they were and what that meant. That caused a lot of concerns raised them from our traveller parents who found it really difficult to understand why a transgender teacher would be coming in and saying what it meant to be transgender. And again, for some of our traveller families they’ve still not quite got over that that as an incident. When it comes to teaching, sort of the relationships education and we want to talk about LGBTQ+ so again what that means and an acceptance of that. Again, lots of our GRT families ask for their children to be withdrawn, and we say well we can't withdraw your children from that element of it, because that is relationships education. If you choose to send your child to this school, then that’s the education that they’re going to get. You can choose to withdraw from non-statutory sex education, that’s fine. And actually, as I say, and that’s just a real conflict, and again like if we carry on down this path then our families are going to say “We’re just going to take them out of school” And where does that leave them? But actually, if we don’t carry on with this path, we’re not giving them the education that they deserve and that we hold dear to as well. So that’s been a real.

NF That’s tough.

HT G Challenging position, we don’t have an answer yet.

NF No, because I can't imagine, there isn’t really an answer is there, there’s probably a yes, a position over time I imagine. That you’ll agree to take, it sounds really hard. I mean the whole transgender issue, presumably is that an issue for some non-traveller families as well, or is it, or do you think it’s specifically very much a traveller issue for you?

HT G It was some of our non-traveller families reporting concerns about it as well. But it was the majority of traveller families and the minority of our non-traveller families. Yeah.

NF Yeah, it’s a tough one.

HT G I’m just thinking of other challenges. I think we, again we had a really interesting conversation at our staff meeting yesterday. We were talking about the different faces almost and different behaviours that some of our traveller children have to show. So, behaviour wise for example, lots of our traveller children can be quite violent, quite quickly. And so, it may well be a punch up first and then I deal with them with the consequences of that later. And we were talking about have we as a staff almost normalised violence a little bit because we understand that that’s the culture that they’re brought up in and we’re again. Within school we can't support that. We can't support you hit people and that’s okay. And yeah, so working, but actually for our children that’s really difficult because at home they might do one thing, and then at school we’re expecting them to behave in a completely different way and understand why they’re being asked to behave in that completely different way. So yeah, I’d say that’s another of our sort of current challenges as well.

NF Yeah absolutely yeah. Okay. Yeah, complex then. It’s a complex identity to deal with.

HT G Another knock.

NF No, that’s fine, go ahead. That must be a challenge at the meeting, the kids wanting to come in in football strip, totally understandable.

HT G To be honest, it’s a challenge for our traveller children’s uniform. And again, I go back and forth on it because again, the better thing is that they’re in school, and I don’t care what they wear, so long as they’re in the building. But at the same time, it’s then the sense of unity and sense of belonging that you get through wearing a uniform. And actually, sort of we’ve let it go a little bit with some of our older children, but now our younger children are saying “Well if they’re wearing that, I want to wear that as well.” And make them just stand out more, if they’re wearing their own clothes. And other non-travellers then look at them and go well yeah, you’re clearly different, and why does school allow to be? Yeah, constant battles and challenges.

NF Yeah. Really, yeah, so interesting. So, my next questions are ones that EMTAS asked me to answer, ask I mean. And you’ve already started to allude to, so what is the support that EMTAS gives you? And we’re also interested to know is there anything they’ve done that’s become kind of your normal school practice rather than things that they still do for you? If that makes any sense.

HT G Yeah. So, support, I’ve mentioned the support we get from EMTAS team member coming in and sort of doing that focus work with our traveller children. And I, the thing that they really enjoy, our traveller children really enjoy about that is just time with an adult who probably understands their culture better than many staff in school do. And again, just gives them that opportunity to talk about aspirations for the future and constant discussions about what they really enjoy and don’t enjoy about school. And I think in some ways sort of like, yes, we’ve moved on and moved past that anyway, because my staff… As I say the most important thing is our relationships with the children. And actually, we see that EMTAS team member can have that good relationship with the children, he only comes in once every six weeks. And actually, we should have a better relationship, and our children should be able to trust us more, than somebody coming in once every six weeks. So yeah, it’s an evolving picture of the sort of relationship that children have with the adults here.

And EMTAS team member also came in and led for us a literacy project which was based around gardening as well. We had a group of four GRT boys last year, who… we were highly suspicious that they were going to leave education at the end of primary school. I mean somewhat disillusioned with education in year 6 as well. And EMTAS team member then led it as a sort of, a bit of a reward project as well, and something fun that they can get themselves really stuck into. Which was really good and developed sort of literacy and numeracy skills within that as well. Which was really successful, and it set up what we’ve now continued to call our travellers garden area within the school.

Yeah, which is great. And again, so we’ve probably taken on bits of that so earlier this year. So, we’ve got a brand-new woodland area in the school, it’s a 4.2 acre plot and we’re sort of continuing to develop that. It’s incredible, but actually I worked with a couple of our traveller boys earlier on this year to say, “Well can you help build this area up here?” So, there’s the compost area. And then again, we had a group who helped me develop part of the early years area as well. And again, it’s identifying the skills that our traveller children have got ,so that they have those opportunities to feel successful in school. So last year they could do gardening so they were able to do that. This year it’s been more, well on the construction bits. We’ve got one of our traveller boys who really struggles to access maths and English curriculum, but give him a saw, and a drill, and he will be able to build pretty much anything. So that’s what we’ve been working on a little bit more with him this year, let’s do a slightly alternative curriculum that you can still learn things through, but yeah, you’re going to be supported.

So yeah, so that’s what (name) has done and what we’ve developed, I guess. And then the coffee events, again like I see that as two aims for that. The first one is developing relationships with our traveller parents. And the second one is then do we have something that we want to do within those coffee events. So, we’ve had a social worker, somebody from childrens services come and talk, we’ve had traveller mums which was hilarious because it was a, I had so many like, “Why she’s coming? What does she want to do?”

NF Yeah, of course, they’d be very anxious about that.

HT G It was just a, “We just want to get you to meet somebody who is a social worker because…” Actually most of the time for most people the only time they meet a social worker is when they knock on your door and they say, “I’m a social worker, can I come in?” And actually, all you want to say is “No, go far away.” But you know, they’re not scary, then it’s okay.

NF On neutral territory.

HT G Yeah, in many ways, yeah, we’ve advanced what we do with our traveller parents beyond the coffee events as well.

NF Great.

HT G Because every event that we do we work out how can we make this an event for our traveller parents who might not read the letter that we send out. They might not get the text message that we send out. They probably won't read the email that we send out. So so much of it is just verbal conversations. Well, “did you know we’ve got X, Y, Z coming up? Would you like to come along and be part of it? So tomorrow we’ve got, what we do is our class exhibition. So every class puts on a show of what they’ve done over the course of the term and parents can come in and see it…” And actually, sometimes we you know, in the past we’ve had really poor attendance from our traveller parents because they just haven’t read the newsletter. So we just make sure we stand out at the gate a week or so before and just say, just a reminder, “Got the class exhibitions coming, would you like to come along?”

NF So I t’s spoken rather than written as it were.

HT G So much of it is spoken word year, which means hardly any of it is recorded. There we go. Which means yeah, as I said, the recordings and letters that we sent out, it’s all just that conversation.

NF Yeah, great. So, they also asked me to ask, and most people have no answer to this one. Were there any aspects of support that have come from EMTAS that you haven’t continued to use?

HT G I don’t think so, because I think the ones that I’ve really mentioned is how we’ve taken it and developed it, rather than not used it.

NF Yeah, absolutely great. Okay. So just moving into kind of thinking a little bit more about what this project is about. It’s basically around uniting my research which has been bringing a way of teaching kids from the US to the UK with EMTAS expertise. But really its main thrust is oracy which is getting quite a plan generally in schools at the minute. And we’re interested to know if any of the schools you work with already have kind of oracy type work going on, like some schools are with Voice 21 or whatever. Have you got anything in your kind of programme of work that is oracy orientated?

HT G So we’ve done in the past. We did a package called Talk Boost, which again didn’t, I don’t think it quite had the impact that we were hoping it was going to have. So, it’s something that’s probably fallen a little bit by the wayside. We did, just, what two weeks ago, we did a whole… So, our cluster of schools that we’re part of, linked with (local secondary school) , so we had (secondary school) and then eight of the primary schools that lead into it. We did a whole staff inset day on sort of vocabulary. And then vocabulary across the whole foundation subject curriculum as well, which was fascinating. Sort of more, brought more questions out really than answers. Thinking well what does this look like and so I think yeah, the sort of thinking now is okay, well what then? So, we know that there’s this big challenge, we know there’s this big problem, we know vocabulary acquisition for all children coming in in early years and particularly with our GRT population. And we know we need to do something but what is that something that we’re going to do? So, I would be very interested in find out a little bit more.

NF Yeah. So, what we’re looking at developing, it’s by no means a magic bullet as you’re well aware that there are no magic bullets in education. But it’s going to be a set of materials that are formed around kind of some basic principles related to oracy. Which the driver for them is kind of research-oriented points from the US, but we’re not going to pick them up and put them here because it wouldn’t work. But it’s kind of around looking at kind of just using talk more often, focussing on small group interventions, focussing on collaborative and enquiry led learning. But also focussing very much on school belonging. So those are going to be the kind of principles.

We’ve been devising it this term so it’s all very new still, we’re still talking as it were. And what we’re going to do is there’ll be a set of online materials that are driven by these principles, and then some ideas of how they might work with children of a different range of proficiencies in English. But also, there would be a specific aspect, a specific kind of folder of stuff around GRT children, and we’re hoping that schools will kind of have a look at it and decide to run with parts of it. It would be unlikely people would say, okay I’m going to pick up this whole set of principles and work with it. But we were hoping schools will kind of think okay, we might try changing our practice in this way and see how that works.

It’s not going to be like measurable intervention, it’s not going to be like kind of a bolt on and it’s not scripted or anything like that, do you know in the way that some of the talk boosts might be, I don’t know. So yeah, that’s kind of what we’re looking at devising and the schools in the project will be effectively evaluating with us how useful the materials are. Whilst at the same time hopefully of course doing something that’s valuable for the school because otherwise why on earth would you do it? That’s what we’re looking at. Yeah. So, what I’ve been asking people is what… Try and imagine your staff dealing with you know, a set of online materials that might shift practice in some way. What might make that accessible? I mean we’ve had that schools wanted to be quick, quick. Quick wins and involving no training, obviously. But you know, what sorts of things in terms of the questions that your school has, you might think you would want to find in there? It doesn’t matter if you don’t know.

HT G No, I’d agree, yeah, quick and easy. I think predominantly it would be LSAs who would deliver this style of work and so almost like model videos of how to deliver it as a… I was going to call it an intervention, but I know you’re not sort of framing it as an intervention, like as a session of like, so that that’s the training that’s involved almost is watching someone else do it. But whether our LSA coaching its sort of a I do, you watch, we talk. You do, I watch you talk, and that model of doing things. And actually yeah, almost something like that.

NF So we don’t have loads of videos, we do have some. Teachers don’t like being videoed, so throughout all my research I try and get teachers to agree to be videoed and they don’t necessarily want to. Or things happen like you know you’ve got an absolutely outstanding teacher, and you go in and film them, and they have a bad day, you know. Something ghastly happens with some child as a you know, a meltdown about something, but anyway, but yes, video definitely would be part of it, bits of.

HT G Again one of the things that really stood out to me on the vocabulary work that we did with (school name); was around the things that were written on like government websites. So, like all the information that came out about COVID for example, and was designed to be a reading age of about 9, because that made it accessible for the majority of adults. In a similar way, I’d say any material to be designed for a low reading. Not because our LSAs are incapable of reading at a higher level, but actually just to make it, I understand, and I can do that. Like not missing things. And almost sort of where like, where vocabulary is used in a way that may, like even simple things like talking about oracy and some of our LSAs might go, well what do you really mean by that?

NF That’s one of the first things we’re going to do, is explain what we mean by it. Absolutely yeah.

HT G But actually just having like simple explanations.

NF Absolutely yeah. No, we’ve really worked a lot on the principles and EMTAS have done a very good job at kind of telling me yeah… How to remember, I was once a teacher and wasn’t always an academic and then there was talk in this ridiculous way, and so yeah. I totally get what you’re saying, the reading age of 9. And that’s not an insult to any of its readers, it’s about I don’t have time to deal with hifalutin phrases that are meaningless to me, absolutely. I mean one of the things we think we’ll also have in it is we’ll have a set of materials for how senior leaders might want to work with it, how teachers will want to work with it, and how LSAs can work with it. So yeah, I mean yeah, so that’s kind of describing it really. And I’ve actually just had an email in from a headteacher I interviewed way back in early May, saying so what’s happening? We’re thinking we’re going to send out an email very first week of next term explaining what the parameters would be. I’m now wondering if I need to bring that forward. I didn’t want to be bothering headteachers in the last, the dying days of the summer term with an important email about this, but I guess people want to know don’t they.

HT G Yeah, maybe, my gut would be send it, and then resend it again in September.

NF I think you’re right, I think that’s what I’m now going to do. I think I just changed my mind as of yesterday, yeah. We’ll do that so it goes out twice. Because people need it at different times don’t they.

HT G Yeah, and yeah, most of us will look at it, semi digest it, and then park it.

NF Yeah, absolutely and then go oh.

HT G It is clear, and I can actually think now.

NF Brilliant, let’s do that, let’s do that then. July and September, good. Yeah. Lovely. Anyway, nobody has to commit now. Just think about what we’ve talked about and then when you see what the outline will involve, it’ll be something like an initial introductory meeting and then kind of decisions about how you want to use it, and then check ins from us between November and February which is when you’d be trying the materials. But I’d put all that in an email, so no decision needed today.

HT G No, certainly that sort of thing I think would be interesting.

NF Yeah, it sounds like something you have questions about so it might be a nice match there. Yeah.

HT G Yeah, definitely.

NF Brilliant.

HT G Anything else that you wanted from me?

NF No, nothing, no I’m all done, is there any other questions you had, or you wanted to share?

HT G No I don’t think so.

NF Thank you so much.

HT G Thank you. Alright.

NF It’s been so interesting talking to you Headteacher G. Thank you so much, I’ll let you get on.

HT G Take care. Bye.

NF Alright and you, bye.