

Recent comments by Dr Diarmuid Martin Archbishop of Dublin shone a light on the fact that negative stereotyping of and racism against the Traveller community has never been seen as anything other than “common sense” in Ireland. Following decades of discrimination and racism against travellers, the Archbishop of Dublin Dr Diarmuid Martin has recently raised concerns over the “emergence of a new language of racism” in Ireland. While I’m sure Dr Martin meant no offence by his comments, they completely ignored the racism that Travellers have suffered for decades. If a man of such great empathy and understanding which I believe he is, can miss this point what chance have the Traveller community got when trying to engage with the wider community on an equal basis, a community that continuously refers to Travellers as “na\*\*\*rs”.

Normally the concept of common sense emerges from the dominant hegemony that prevails in any society. In the case of Ireland, we have a common sense that refers to Travellers as “na\*\*\*rs” this is usually attached to a pejorative word such as: dirty, stupid, lazy or robbing to name a few. In the past the same type of language was used to describe people of colour where words such as “p\*\*\*e” or “ni\*\*\*r” tripped off peoples tongue without a thought just as “na\*\*\*r” does now. Thankfully as a society we recognised the damage that this type of racist language causes to people and to a great extent is no longer acceptable in normal discourse the exception being “na\*\*\*r”.

If we are serious about tackling racism and hate speech, we need to move away from “common sense” and instead embrace “good sense”. To do this we need to challenge the use of the word “na\*\*\*r” at every opportunity. This could be done by recognising within the proposed legislation that the use of specific words such as “na\*\*\*r” will be interpreted as hate speech.

Although not the answer to all the racism and discrimination facing the Traveller community it would send out a strong message that the long held racist attitudes to the traveller community are no longer acceptable and that the language we use to describe really does matter.