

SCiP Alliance Thriving Lives Toolkit: Implementation and Impact Evaluation



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Košťálová, H., Cudlínová, M., Blake, H., Clark, L., Dimsits, M., Kavková, E., Graungaard, E., Moore, N., Sigaard H., J., Neary, S., Nemcova, L., Nogueira Perez, M., A., Fernandez Rey, E., and Ceinos Sanz, C. (2021). ['A Practitioner's Guide to Uncharted Waters of Career Counselling, a Critical Reflection Perspective'](#). Prague: EKS.

Moore, N., Clark, L., Neary, S., & Blake, H. (2021). 'Crucial impacts on career choices: Research to understand the influences on young people's choices in primary and secondary schools: Final report'. Derby: University of Derby

Staunton, T., Rogosic, K. (2021). [Labour market information and social justice: a critical examination.](#) International Journal of Educational and Vocational Guidance.

Thambar, N., Neary, S., & Zlatic, F. (2021). ['The 21st Century HE Careers Professional'](#). Manchester: HECSU.

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Executive Summary

KEY FINDINGS

Primary and secondary schools responded positively to the Thriving Lives Toolkit, finding it to be a valuable resource which promoted auditing, action planning and development. All schools made progress on the principles, even when they had only been using it for a short time frame. Senior leadership support was important for facilitating this.

The progress made by schools started with appointing a named contact and typically involved making use of local and national support groups and evidence based resources to increase staff awareness and implement a range of intervention. Most often these were focused on making transition more effective but schools also spent time on improving wellbeing and attainment.

Schools perceived several outcomes as a consequence of this activity. School staff were more confident in supporting Service children and this had become a key activity in schools. Service children were perceived to have improved wellbeing and to be more engaged in school. Schools had improved relationships with Service families.

The findings suggest then that the self-assessment process enabled schools to improve their provision so engaging with the Toolkit has facilitated activity, progress and positive outcomes for Service children.

In 2020, the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust provided funding to scale-up an evidence-based school framework across the UK, to enable U.K. schools to develop better support for Service children, whose wellbeing and learning can suffer from the stress and disruption of mobility and separation. This framework - the Thriving Lives Toolkit – is comprised of seven principles supplemented with guidance and actions to help schools achieve them:

1. Our approach is clear.
2. Wellbeing is supported.
3. Achievement is maximised.
4. Transition is effective.
5. Children are heard.
6. Parents are engaged.
7. Staff are well-informed.

The Toolkit was launched during 2019 and 2020 with over 600 schools from across the United Kingdom attending conferences to learn about the Toolkit and how it could be used. This research looked at those schools that engaged with the Thriving Lives Toolkit launched in English SCiP Alliance Hub conferences, considering these schools to be an informal pilot group that offered the opportunity to explore three research objectives:

1. The progress made by schools that have been implementing the seven principles within the Toolkit.
2. The activities involved in implementing the seven principles.
3. The outcomes associated with the implementation of the principles to date.

Methodology

This research adopted an exploratory approach using a cross-sectional design. The predominant form of data collection was a survey comprised of 5 parts:

1. Information about the size and nature of the school and its pupils.
2. Length of time schools have been engaging with the Toolkit.
3. Ratings of provision against each of the seven principles within the Toolkit before engaging with the Toolkit versus now.
4. Ratings of the extent to which activities that underpin the seven principles have been engaged with (derived by the research team from the Toolkit).
5. Ratings of the extent to which outcomes had been observed (derived from the SCiP Alliance Theory of Change)

Twenty state schools responded to the survey of which 7 were primary (which included infant and junior schools) and 13 were secondary schools. Schools ranged in size from 97 pupils on roll (a primary) to 1700 in one secondary with varying percentages of Service children. At primary level Service children comprised between 3% and 74% of all pupils on roll. At secondary level they comprised between 3% and 54% of all pupils on roll.

The survey methodology was supported by a smaller element of qualitative data collection from English schools in two online hub meetings exploring the same topics addressed in the survey. Further qualitative research (semi-structured interviews by telephone) was

conducted with Service families (N=7) to explore the impacts on Service families of schools offering support as advocated within the Thriving Lives Toolkit.

Findings

Most schools had been working with the Thriving Lives Toolkit for between 3 and 12 months and whilst longer time frames were beneficial for embedding multiple principles, time was not critical. Likewise, size of school or primary/secondary status was not a key factor in determining progress. Whilst the percentage of Service children in the school provided impetus to make progress, senior leadership support appeared to be a key factor in determining how much progress could be made.

Key Findings For The Principles

Three descriptors are used to categorise the level of practice a school has achieved:

- **Emerging** – school is actively reflecting on their activity and may be implementing actions to enhance their support, albeit to a small extent.
- **Developing** – school is addressing the principle to a good extent, but this may be partial or yet to be enhanced through regular monitoring and evaluation.
- **Embedding** - school is fully addressing this principle with well-established work that is routinely monitored and evaluated and showing evidence of impact.

The progress made by schools, the activities they engaged with and the outcomes they observed are summarised for each principle below.

Principle 1: Our Approach is Clear

Progress	➤ Four schools stayed at the emerging level of practice. ➤ Eight schools moved from emerging practice to developing practice. ➤ Two schools moved up to embedded practice. ➤ Four schools moved from developing to embedded practice.
Activities	❖ Nineteen schools appointed a named member of staff. ❖ Sixteen schools spent time reporting on activities and outcomes for Service children. ❖ Fifteen schools spent time implementing methods of monitoring and evaluation.
Outcomes	✓ Senior leadership understand the importance of using the toolkit. ✓ Senior leadership have implemented policies and practices to support Service children. ✓ Supporting service children is a key activity in school.

Principle 2: Wellbeing is supported

Progress	➤ Nine schools moved from emerging to developing practice. ➤ Two schools moved from emerging to embedding practice. ➤ Six schools moved from developing to embedding practice.
Activities	❖ Most schools spent significant time implementing interventions to improve the wellbeing of their Service children. ❖ These interventions were focussed on supporting transition, supporting Service children whilst a parent was on deployment and developing relationships with Service families.
Outcomes	✓ There were stronger relationships between school and Service families. ✓ Service families felt better supported. ✓ Service children had improved well-being. ✓ Service children were more engaged in class and in school generally.

Principle 3: Achievement is maximised

Progress	➤ Nine schools moved from emerging to developing practice. ➤ Two schools from emerging to embedding practice. ➤ Six schools moved from developing to embedding practice.
Activities	❖ Most schools implemented interventions to support Service children's wellbeing and support them through transition. ❖ Interventions to directly increase attainment were less prevalent but nine schools reported spending a lot of time on this.
Outcomes	✓ Service children were more engaged in class and in school generally. ✓ Service children's attendance and academic performance was improved.

Principle 4: Transition is effective

Progress	➤ Nine schools moved from emerging to developing practice ➤ Two schools moved from emerging to embedding practice ➤ Six schools moved from developing to embedding practice
Activities	❖ Most schools spent significant time implementing interventions to improve the wellbeing of their Service children ❖ These interventions were focused on supporting transition, supporting Service children whilst a parent was on deployment and developing relationships with Service families.
Outcomes	✓ There were stronger relationships between school and Service families ✓ Service families felt better supported ✓ Service children had improved well-being ✓ Service children were more engaged in class and in school generally

Principle 5: Children are heard

Progress	➤ Eight schools moved from emerging to developing practice. ➤ Three schools moved from developing to embedding practice.
Activities	❖ Twelve schools spent a lot of time developing relationships with Service families, the remaining eight spent some time on this. ❖ Eighteen schools spent some or a lot of time linking into local and national support groups.
Outcomes	✓ Service families feel better supported. ✓ There are stronger relationships between school and Service families. ✓ Service children are more engaged in class and in school generally.

Principle 6: Parents are engaged

Progress	➤ Eight schools moved from emerging to developing practice. ➤ Two schools moved from emerging to embedding practice.
Activities	❖ Most schools spent significant time on developing relationships with Service families. ❖ Many schools also spent a lot of time linking in to local and national support groups.
Outcomes	✓ Service families feel better supported. ✓ Service children have improved well-being. ✓ There are stronger relationships between school and Service families. ✓ Service children are more engaged in class and in school generally. ✓ School staff know who the Service children in their classes are.

Principle 7: Staff are well informed	
Progress	➤ Six schools moved from emerging to developing practice. ➤ Two schools moved from emerging to embedding practice. ➤ Four schools moved from developing to embedding practice.
Activities	❖ All schools spent at least some time using evidence-based resources. ❖ Nearly all schools devoted at least a little time to delivering Continuing Professional Development. ❖ Most schools also spent time networking with other schools and linking into local and national support groups.
Outcomes	✓ School staff are more aware of where to find resources and help so they can support the Service children in our school. ✓ Senior leadership understand the importance of using the toolkit. ✓ School staff are more confident in supporting Service children. ✓ School staff are more aware of the issues concerning Service children ✓ Supporting service children is a key activity in school. ✓ School staff work collaboratively with other staff in our school to support Service children. ✓ School staff know who the Service children in their classes are.

Conclusions

Focus groups, interviews and survey responses all indicated that the Thriving Lives Toolkit had been perceived by schools as a positive and useful resource. The importance of auditing practice was noted by schools and led in some schools to development being written into school improvement plans.

All schools made some form of progress in implementing the principles. This was not necessarily closely related to the length of time they had been working with the Thriving Lives Toolkit; thus, time was beneficial, but not critical. Support from senior leadership, as has been found in the implementation of other frameworks in schools, is important and most schools who took part noted they had used evidence-based resources and support organisations to some extent.

The activity which most schools had been engaged with was appointing a member of staff as a named point of contact (an aspect of Principle 1 – Our Approach is Clear). The two other activities which many schools had been engaged with were developing relationships with Service families (an aspect of Principle 2 – Parents are engaged) and implementing interventions designed to improve wellbeing (an aspect of Principle 2 – Wellbeing is supported). The act of appointing a named member of staff as a point of contact appears to have been a key activity. This act is important for clarifying responsibilities, galvanising progress and improving communication within school teams and between the school and parents as can be seen by the increased engagement with parents and the increased awareness and confidence of staff in supporting Service children.

The outcomes which respondents were most likely to agree they had observed in their schools were:

- That staff knew who the Service children in their classes were.
- That these Service children were more engaged in class and had improved well-being.
- That there were stronger relationships with Service families.
- That staff were more likely to be working collaboratively to support Service children.

These findings provide tentative evidence for the efficacy of the Thriving Lives Toolkit in relation to improving provision and outcomes for Service children, at least in the short-term. The present research lacked the methodological rigour of a control group or of objective measures of progress and outcomes, so there is a need for a methodologically rigorous longitudinal evaluation of school's use of the Toolkit which draws on multiple data sources to evidence how the Toolkit is implemented and the outcomes and impacts this has for schools, Service families and of course Service children.

SCiP Alliance Thriving Lives Toolkit: Implementation and Impact Evaluation

About the research project

The Service Children's Progression (SCiP) Alliance is a partnership of organisations focused on improving outcomes for children from military families. They aim to do this through developing collaborative hubs of stakeholders and practitioners, developing evidence-based resources and support, leading rigorous research and raising awareness of Service children's needs (www.scipalliance.org). Their Theory of Change can be seen below in Figure 1.

In 2020, the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust provided funding to scale-up an evidence-based school framework across the UK, to enable U.K. schools to develop better support for Service children, whose wellbeing and learning can suffer from the stress and disruption of mobility and separation. This research project has built upon earlier research carried out by the International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS) for the SCiP Alliance (Burke, Neary, Hanson, Parker, Everitt & Clark, 2019) which contributed to the well-received Thriving Lives Toolkit. The Toolkit is a framework of seven principles supplemented with guidance and actions to help schools achieve them (see Figure 2). The principles include having a clear approach to working with Service children, supporting their wellbeing and achievement, making effective transitions, listening to them, engaging with parents, and ensuring that staff are well informed. The Toolkit was launched during 2019 and 2020 with over 600 schools from across the United Kingdom attending conferences to learn about the Toolkit and how it could be used.

Since then, iCeGS have worked with the SCiP Alliance to examine school and stakeholder responses to the Thriving Lives Toolkit across the different nations of the UK. The original research which underpinned the Thriving Lives Toolkit development was conducted with schools and stakeholders in England but of course education policy and practice differs across the four nations of the UK, necessitating a check on the Toolkit's appropriateness, relevance and utility in each.

Figure 1 SCiP Alliance Theory of Change (www.SCiPAlliance.org)



Figure 2 Thriving Lives Toolkit 7 Principles of effective support (www.SCiPAlliance.org)



		Principle	Vision
The 7 principles of effective support	1	Our approach is clear	Leaders' understanding and approach ensure resources and policies improve Service children's outcomes.
	2	Wellbeing is supported	Tailored pastoral provision supports Service children's mental health and wellbeing.
	3	Achievement is maximised	Teaching, assessment and support ensure the continuity of Service children's learning and progression.
	4	Transition is effective	Systems and support ensure seamless transitions for Service children arriving at and leaving school.
	5	Children are heard	Service children's diverse voices are heard and inform the support they receive.
	6	Parents are engaged	Strong home-school partnerships help Service families feel valued as part of the school community.
	7	Staff are well-informed	Supportive training and networks ensure all staff understand and support each Service child.

The findings by Blake, Neary & Alexander (2022) revealed that there were some differences in terminology across the UK, most notably that in Scotland the term Service children is replaced with Armed Forces children. However, this new piece of research looks at those schools that have engaged with the Thriving Lives Toolkit which was launched in English SCiP Alliance Hub conferences, predominantly attended by representatives from English schools and stakeholder groups. In the present report, we therefore retain the use of the term Service children.

The schools who attended these Hub conferences and downloaded the Toolkit are collectively viewed here as an informal pilot group that offered the opportunity to explore:

1. The progress made by schools that have been implementing the seven principles within the Toolkit
2. The activities involved in implementing the seven principles
3. The outcomes associated with the implementation of the principles to date

Methodology

This research served as an initial impact evaluation of the Thriving Lives Toolkit. It adopted an exploratory approach using a cross-sectional design with the predominant form of data collection being a survey. The survey focussed on collecting quantitative data to allow an exploration of perceived progress made and the outcomes schools perceived to be associated with it. It collected data from schools who had attended one of the SCiP Alliance conferences which launched the Toolkit between 2019 and 2020. The survey methodology was supported by a smaller element of qualitative data collection which is described in more detail below. Ethical approval was sought and gained from the College (Arts, Humanities & Education) Ethics Committee at the University of Derby.

Survey

An online survey was developed, comprised of 5 parts:

1. Information about the size and nature of the school and its pupils.
2. Length of time schools have been engaging with the Toolkit.
3. Ratings of provision against each of the seven principles within the Toolkit before engaging with the Toolkit versus now.
4. Ratings of the extent to which activities that underpin the seven principles have been engaged with (derived by the research team from the Toolkit). The survey asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they had engaged with fifteen different activities on a three-point scale: not at all; a little; a lot. The researchers devised a list of activities to aid exploration of how schools went about implementing the principles. These activities were derived from the Thriving Lives Toolkit and the underpinning criteria for the seven principles and actions described within it which included aspects such as writing new policies, implementing different interventions, training and networking. Respondents were also provided with space to add other activities they may have been engaging with. No responses were recorded to this open question.
5. Ratings of the extent to which potential associated outcomes have been observed. The survey required respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed or

disagreed with 17 statements describing possible outcomes from using the Thriving Lives Toolkit. The outcomes were generated from the SCiP Alliance Theory of Change (See Figure 1). The response scale used was a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) through 3 (neither agree nor disagree) to five (strongly disagree).

The survey was predominantly multiple choice (see Appendix 1) to reduce time required to complete it and ensure that the data was appropriate for statistical analyses. There were however a limited number of open-ended questions where participants could enter more detail about the progress made, activities delivered or outcomes they had experienced.

A link to the online survey was sent out by the SCiP Alliance project team to representatives from schools who had attended one or more of their conferences in the previous 12 months and who had agreed to be contacted in the future. The survey was also sent out by leads in the SCiP Alliance hubs which exist in Scotland, Wales and across England (East Anglia, Greater Manchester, London, Lancashire and the Northwest, Lincolnshire and the East Midlands, Oxfordshire and Central England, Southwest, South, West Midlands and Yorkshire and the Northeast) and to schools which had received a Ministry of Defence Education Support Fund grant. The link was issued twice; once in April 2021 and once in October 2021.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Response rates to the survey were impacted by the challenging circumstances schools have faced since the Covid pandemic began. Survey fatigue, lack of time and constantly changing circumstances meant that only 20 survey responses were received. To supplement this dataset, the research team accessed staff from English schools in two online hub meetings and held short focus groups with them regarding what they had done with the Toolkit and what outcomes they felt they had realised.

Further qualitative research (semi-structured interviews by telephone) was conducted with Service families (N=7) to explore the impacts on Service families of schools offering support

as advocated within the Thriving Lives Toolkit. These families had been based in at least two different countries during their Service including England, Scotland and the United States of America. The children ranged in age from 5 years to 17. Parents were in the Royal Air Force, the Army and the Navy, and had been in service from between eight and twenty years.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the present research. There was no control group to compare progress or outcomes with and the schools were not chosen at random – they self-selected to engage with the Toolkit and self-selected to take part in this research. The data was predominantly from school staff and as such was subject to variety of biases; we must trust that their self-assessments on the seven principles were accurate as we must with their observations of outcomes.

Findings

In this section we first describe the responding schools and then present an overview of time working with the toolkit in relation to progress made. We then present the remaining findings by principle, looking at:

1. The progress made by schools on the principle.
2. The activities schools have focussed on in relation to that principle.
3. The outcomes which schools perceive in relation to the principle (where possible) since beginning to work with the Thriving Lives Toolkit.

The Schools

Twenty schools responded to the survey of which 7 were primary (which included infant and junior schools) and 13 were secondary schools. All twenty schools were state schools located in England. Survey respondents were asked to provide information on the approximate number of students on roll and the approximate percentage of which were Service children. Results are shown in Table 1 below, detailing minimum, maximum and mean numbers for primary and secondary schools. These results suggest that schools from a range of sizes are represented in the data – the smallest number of pupils on roll in a primary was 97 and for a

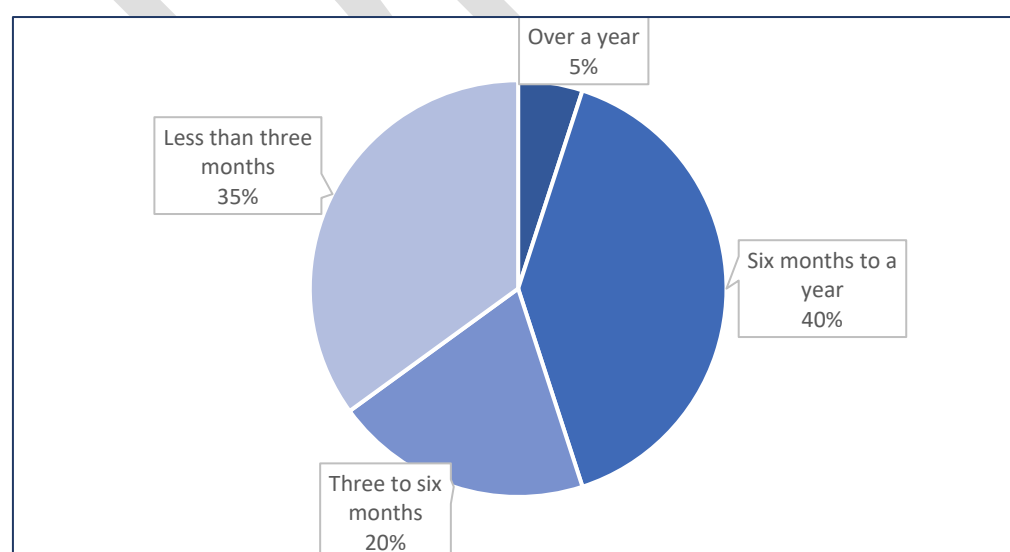
secondary was 467. The largest number of pupils on roll was 600 in a primary and 1700 in a secondary. There were also varying percentages of Service children in these schools. At primary level Service children comprised between 3% and 74% of all pupils on roll. At secondary level they comprised between 3% and 54% of all pupils on roll.

Table 1 Approximate number of pupils on roll and percentage of Service children, by school type

	Approximate number of students on roll			Approximate % of Service children		
	Minimum number of pupils	Maximum number of pupils	Mean number of pupils	Minimum number of Service children	Maximum number of Service children	Mean number of Service children
Primary schools	97	600	307	3%	74%	25%
Secondary schools	467	1700	679	3%	54%	12%

Although one school had been working with the Toolkit for over a year, seven schools had been doing so for less than three months, four had been working with the Toolkit for between three and six months and eight had been working with it for between six months and a year (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 Percentage of schools and time spent working with the Thriving Lives Toolkit



The Thriving Lives Toolkit encourages schools to consider several underpinning criteria for each principle, record evidence of what is taking place for each of these criteria and self-assess as to the level of practice the school has achieved. Exemplars are given in this report for each of the seven principles in the Toolkit to highlight the activities, processes or practices which can represent achievement of each principle. Across the seven principles, three descriptors are used to categorise the level of practice a school has achieved (and were used to capture level of practice in the survey):

- **Emerging** – school is actively reflecting on their activity and may be implementing actions to enhance their support, albeit to a small extent.
- **Developing** – school is addressing the principle to a good extent, but this may be partial or yet to be enhanced through regular monitoring and evaluation.
- **Embedding** - school is fully addressing this principle with well-established work that is routinely monitored and evaluated and showing evidence of impact.

Looking at the change in levels of practice against time spent working with the Toolkit, Table 2 shows, for each school:

- the time they had been working with the Thriving Lives Toolkit
- the number of principles which they rated as having improved by at least one level,
- the number of principles by survey point which had reached emerging, developing and embedding levels of practice.

The data does not reveal clear relationships between the amount of time since engaging with the Toolkit and the number of principles that had either been developed from one level to another or indeed the number of principles being practiced at the embedded level. This may be because of differences in existing practice, differences in school size, differences in the percentage of Service children on roll, and whether the school was a Primary or Secondary, but may also be due to differences in resources (time and financial) and in school priorities. One survey respondent noted, for example, that:

“Headteacher not on board with the Toolkit - has been left to me to complete for all”

Despite this, it does appear that longer time frames are beneficial (but not critical) for embedding multiple principles.

Table 2 Individual schools, time spent engaging with Toolkit and Principle Progress by survey point

SCHOOL	Time spent engaging with Toolkit in months	AT SURVEY POINT			
		Number of principles which moved up at least one level of practice	Number of principles at emerging level of practice	Number of principles at developing level of practice	Number of principles at embedding level of practice
Primary 1	3-6	5	0	0	7
Primary 2	< 3	0	2	5	0
Primary 3	3-6	2	2	5	0
Primary 4	< 3	1	3	4	0
Primary 5	6-12	2	0	2	5
Primary 6	6-12	5	1	6	0
Primary 7	6-12	5	0	0	7
Secondary 1	< 3	6	1	6	0
Secondary 2	3-6	5	0	5	2
Secondary 3	< 3	4	2	5	0
Secondary 4	6-12	6	0	2	5
Secondary 5	< 3	7	0	3	4
Secondary 6	3-6	5	0	3	4
Secondary 7	6-12	7	0	2	5
Secondary 8	< 3	7	0	7	0
Secondary 9	< 3	2	4	3	0
Secondary 10	6-12	2	1	5	1
Secondary 11	6-12	4	0	5	2
Secondary 12	> 12	7	0	6	1
Secondary 13	6-12	7	0	3	4

The Principles

This section presents each principle in turn, identifying progress made by schools, time spent on relevant activities for that principle and exploring what outcomes schools perceived consequently. Where qualitative data can contribute to this it is included.

The full list of activities assessed and the time that schools reported spending on each can be seen in Appendix 2. The full list of perceived outcomes and the extent to which schools agreed they had perceived that outcome can be seen in Appendix 3.

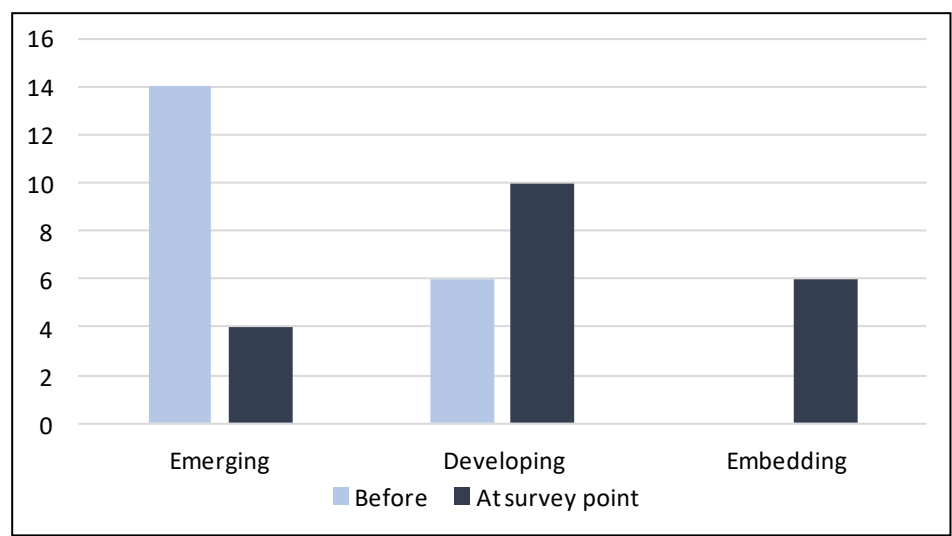
Principle 1: Our approach is clear

Principle 1 is concerned with having a stable and clear provision for Service children with available resources, a lead role with responsibility for Service children and the monitoring of activities. Research identified that practice supporting this principle may include:

- *Having a clear strategy for the targeted deployment of any dedicated funding*
- *Publishing a dedicated strategy for supporting Armed Forces children, for example through the school website*
- *Evaluating the impact of a dedicated strategy, changing it when it is deemed not to be presenting good value for money*
- *Monitoring and reporting on outcomes for Armed Forces children*
- *Governing body minutes (England and Wales) or Parent Councils (Scotland) evidencing challenge around Armed Forces children's academic progress, achievement and wellbeing*
- *Strategy and leadership is informed by Armed Forces children's voices*
- *Named staff contact*

Before they had begun using the Thriving Lives Toolkit, most schools (N= 14) felt their practice for principle 1 was emerging, with only 6 recording their practice as developing – however this had changed significantly by the survey point with only four schools recording themselves as still being emerging during data collection. By this point ten schools rated themselves as developing and six felt their practice for this principle was now embedded (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 Schools' ratings of practice before using the Toolkit versus now.

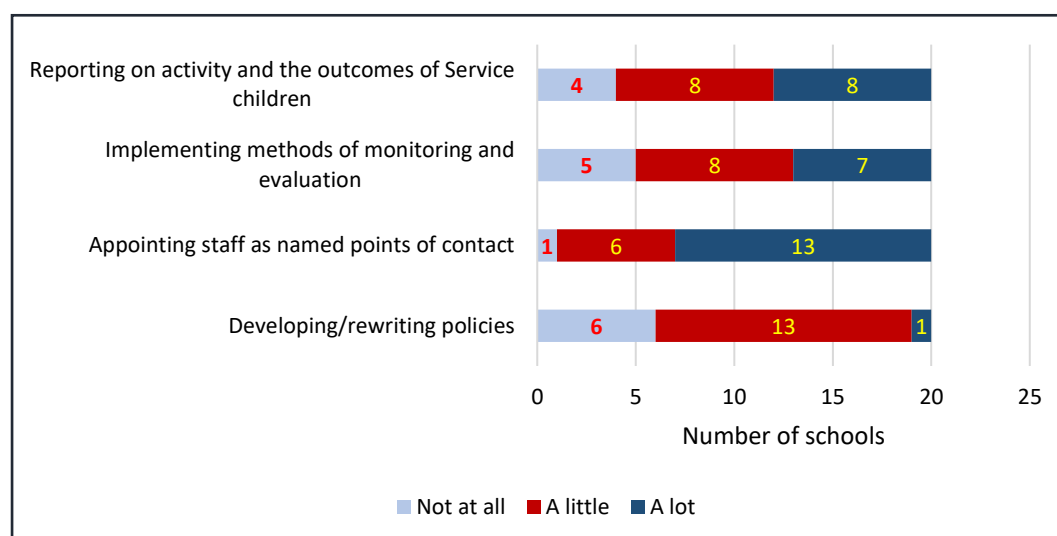


Four schools stayed at the emerging level of practice, but eight schools reported having moved from emerging practice to developing practice, two reported moving up to embedded practice and four schools reported they had moved from developing to embedded practice:

	Emerging	Developing	Embedding
Principle 1: Our approach is clear	2 schools		
		6 schools	
			4 schools
			3 schools

Schools self-assessing as making progress with principle 1 appears to be the consequence of four types of activity (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 Time spent on Principle 1 activities



All but one school reported that they had appointed a member of staff as a named point of contact. Schools also noted that they had been reporting on activity and the outcomes of Service children with 8 schools indicating they had spent a lot of time on this and a further 8 reporting they had spent some time on it. Finally, schools also reported that they had been engaged with implementing methods of monitoring and evaluation regarding their Service children, with 7 schools reporting they had spent a lot of time on this and 8 reporting they had spent some time on this. Developing/rewriting policies was the activity which schools appeared to have spent the least time on; only 1 school reported spending a lot of time on this, although 13 did report having spent a little time on this activity.

Schools perceived three outcomes in relation to principle 1 with most schools agreeing that:

- Senior leadership understand the importance of using the toolkit.
- Senior leadership have implemented policies and practices to support Service children.
- Supporting service children is a key activity in school.

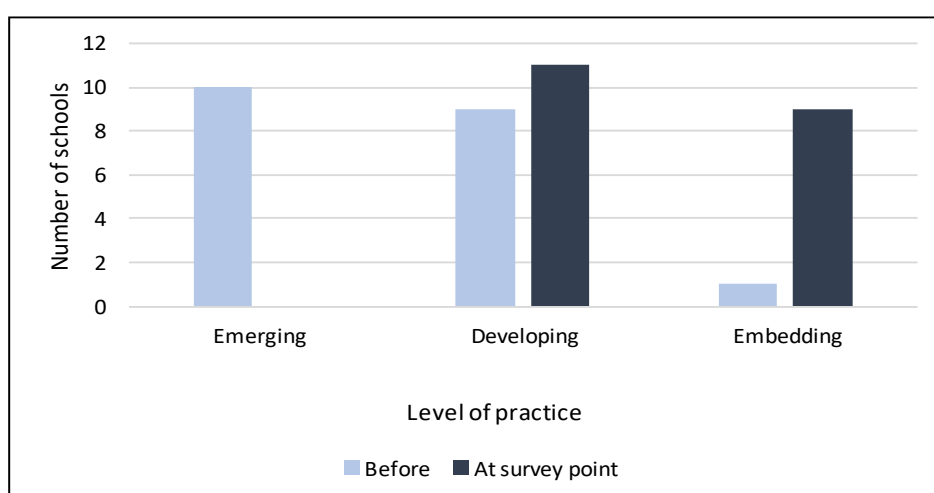
Principle 2: Wellbeing is supported

This principle is concerned with ensuring that Service children receive tailored pastoral provision that recognises their unique situation and supports mental health and wellbeing, particularly during deployment cycles. Examples of good practice include:

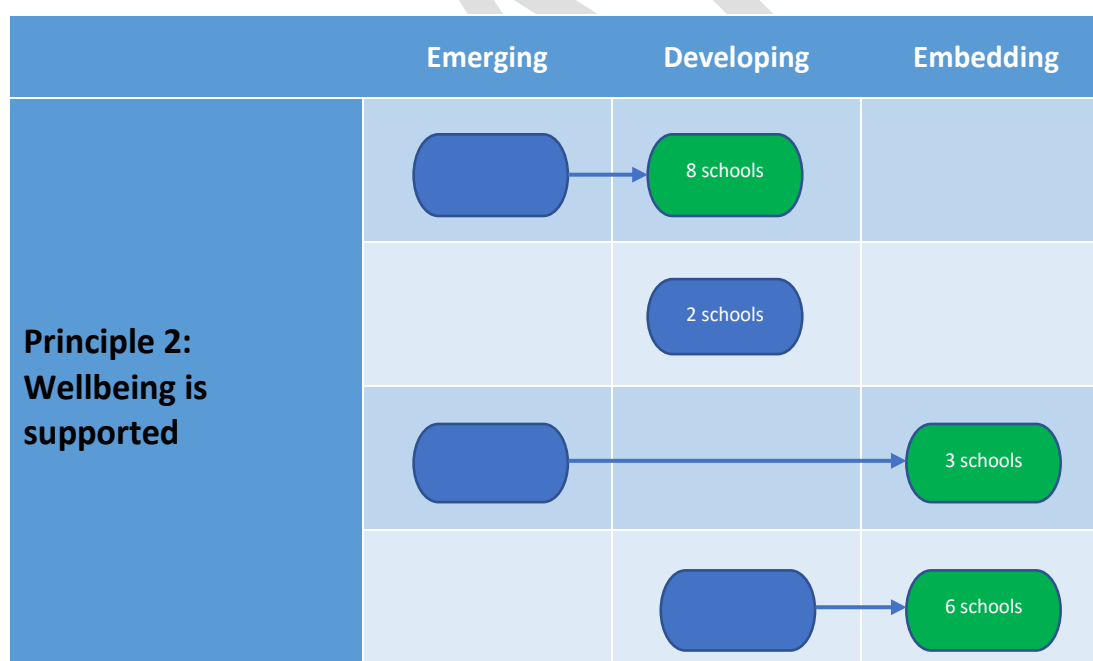
- *Opportunities for Armed Forces children to explore their experiences and feelings with other Armed Forces children in clubs such as those facilitated by the MKC Heroes network*
- *Engagement with parents to be aware of upcoming deployments*
- *Supporting a child to research and map a deployed or weekend parent's location*
- *Exploiting any opportunities in the curriculum to support children and their peers to understand where a deployed parent is stationed*
- *Embedding understanding of Armed Forces in the curriculum*
- *Ensuring all staff understand the range of Armed Forces children's potential experiences and emotions during the different stages of deployment and separation*
- *Organising resources for families to maintain connections during periods of separation*

Before engaging with the Toolkit, ten schools reported they were at the emerging level of practice, nine reported they were developing, and one reported themselves as having embedded practice. At the survey point this had shifted such that eleven schools were now developing and 9 were embedding their practice (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 Schools' ratings of practice for principle 2 before using the Toolkit versus now



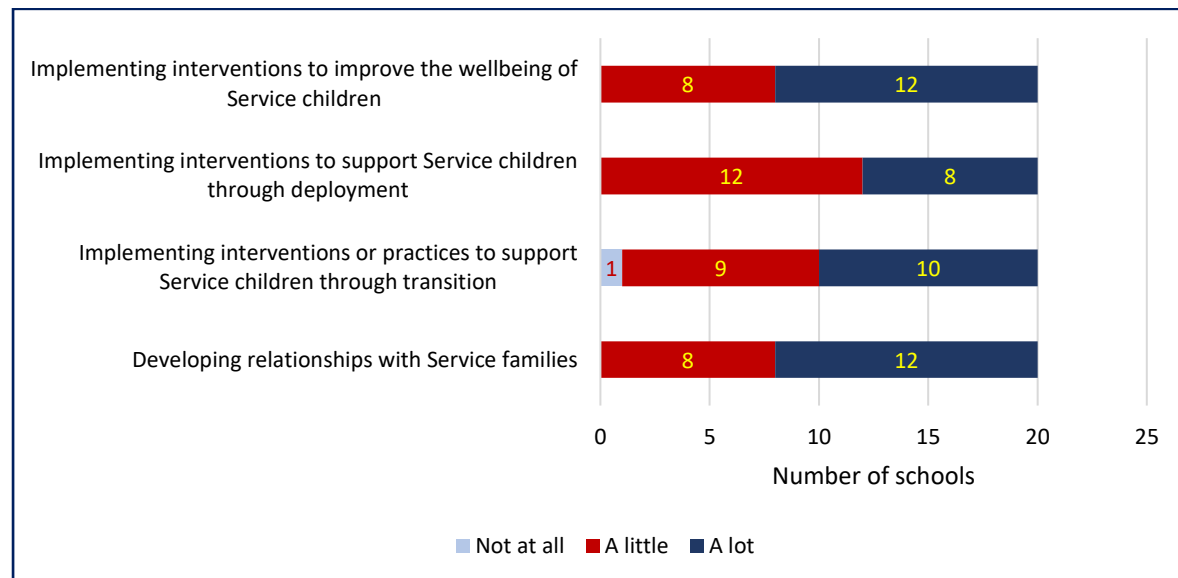
Nine schools moved from emerging to developing practice, two from emerging to embedding and six from developing to embedding practice, with the remaining schools staying at the developing level:



The majority of schools reported spending a lot of time implementing interventions to improve the wellbeing of Service children, support Service children through transition and develop relationships with Service families. Fewer schools reported they had spent a lot of

time implementing interventions to support Service children through deployment (8 schools) but 12 stated they had spent a little time on this.

Figure 7 Time spent on activities related to Principle 2



Implementing interventions to support wellbeing was something that every school had spent at least some time on. In an interview with a Service family, one parent described an assignment given to his child in an English lesson (to write a poem) and how the teacher encouraged the child to write the poem to the father who was away on deployment. Small adaptations in class, made by teaching staff, are relatively simple to do and further highlight the importance of all staff being aware of Service children and familial working patterns.

The outcomes that schools perceived as a consequence of this activity were:

- There are stronger relationships between school and Service families
- Service families feel better supported
- Service children have improved well-being
- Service children are more engaged in class and in school generally

In each case over 80% of responding schools agreed these outcomes had been observed.

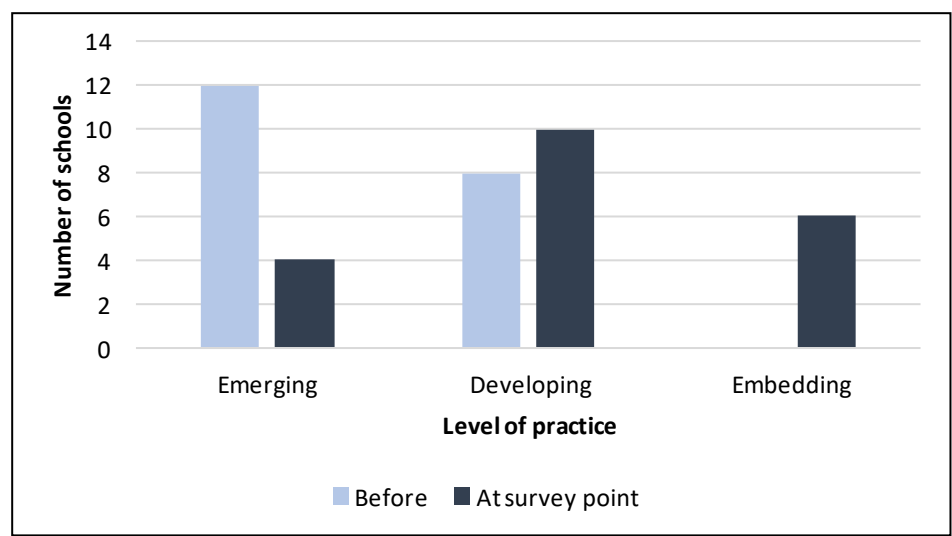
Principle 3: Achievement is maximised

This principle is concerned with implementing teaching, assessment, and support practices to ensure that Service children's learning and progression is subject to as little disruption as possible from transition and deployment cycles. Research identified that practice supporting this principle may include:

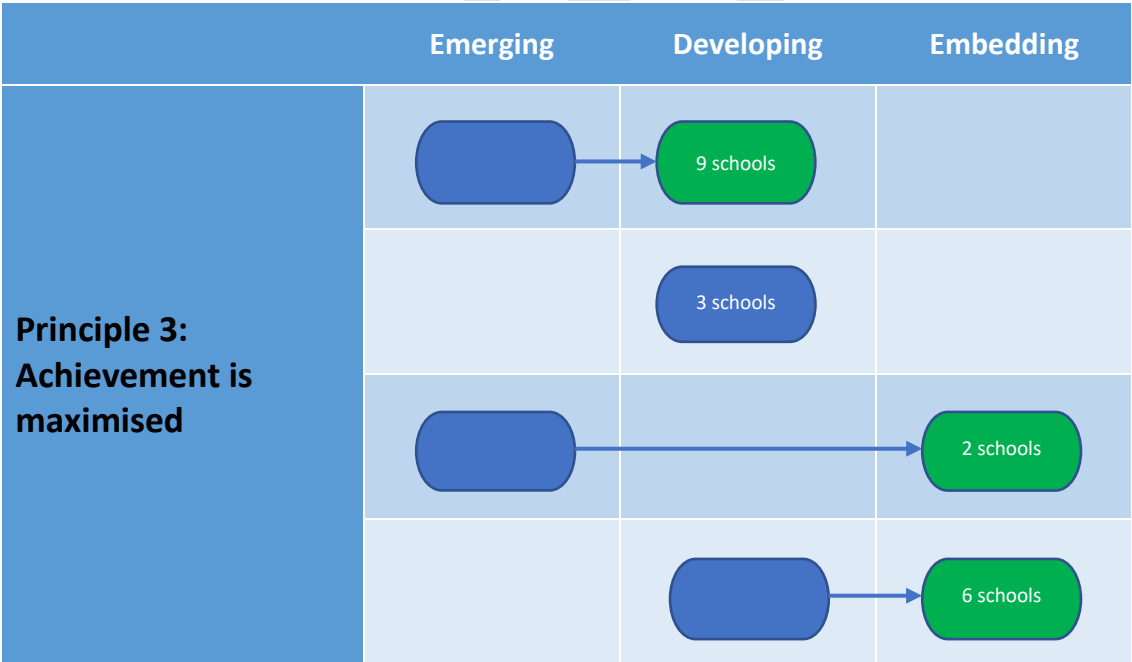
- *Assessment of new arrivals, taking into account the need for a sense of security before undertaking assessments*
- *Ongoing assessment and monitoring*
- *Ensuring that a strong focus is placed on ensuring that an Armed Forces child's emotional health and wellbeing is supported as a precursor to academic achievement*
- *One-to-one support or catch-up sessions*
- *Ensuring Armed Forces children are offered additional careers support and exposure to alternative trajectories*
- *Support for developing and showcasing strengths*
- *Understanding the national picture on Armed Forces children's achievement and what it means for your approach*
- *Catch-up support to address curriculum gaps*
- *Support to access extra-curricular opportunities*

Before engaging with the Toolkit, twelve schools reported themselves as being at the emerging level of practice and eight were at the developing level. At survey point only four felt they were still at the emerging level, ten reported themselves at the developing level and six felt they had reached the embedded level (see Figure 8).

Figure 8 Schools' ratings of practice for principle 3 before using the Toolkit versus now



Nine schools moved from emerging to developing practice, two from emerging to embedding and six from developing to embedding practice, with the remaining schools staying at the developing level:

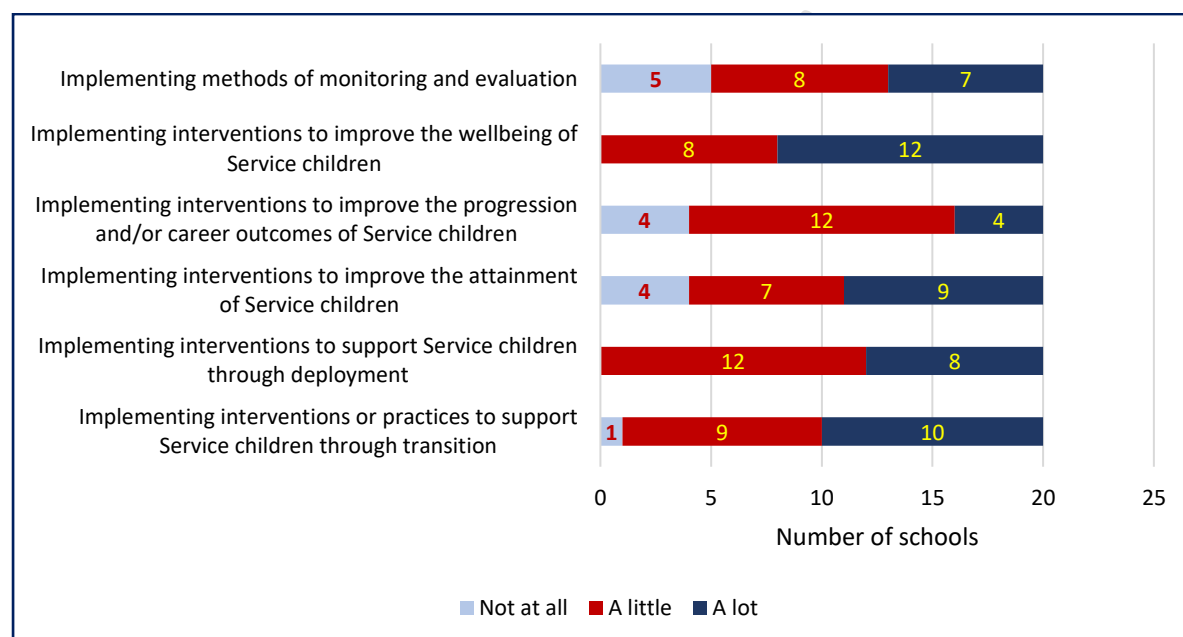


The activity which saw most schools spending a lot of time on was implementing interventions or practices to support Service children’s wellbeing followed by implementing interventions to support them through transition (see Figure 9). This was followed by implementing interventions to improve the attainment of Service children and then implementing

interventions to support Service children through deployment. Monitoring and evaluation had some or a lot of time spent on it by most schools.

Far fewer schools spent a lot of time implementing interventions to improve progression and/or career outcomes of Service children, however, since many schools in the sample were primary schools this is perhaps not surprising.

Figure 9 Time spent on activities underpinning Principle 3



Schools agreed that Service children were more engaged in class and in school generally. They also agreed that Service children's attendance and their academic performance was improved. Schools were less likely to agree that Service children's post-16 destinations were improved however, again many schools were primary and longer-term outcomes like post-16 destinations are less likely to be realised in the timeframes of the present research.

Principle 4: Transition is effective

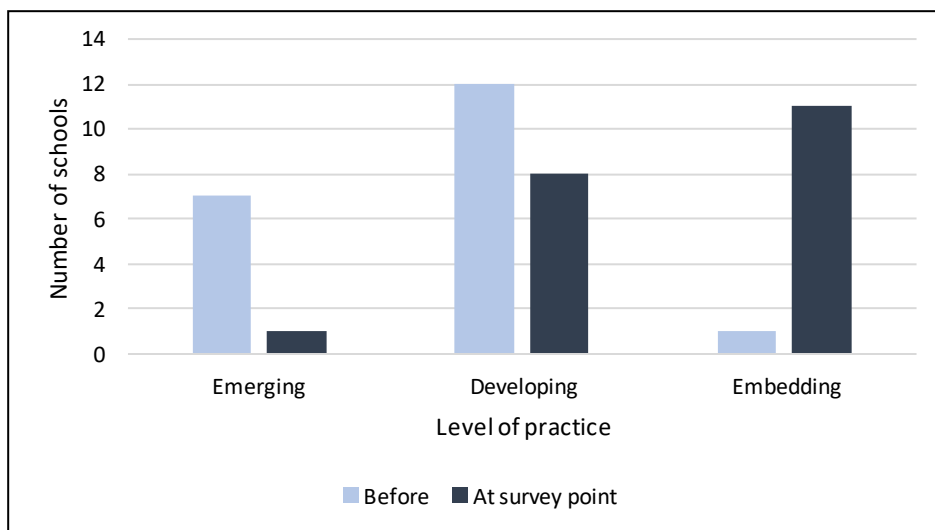
This principle aims to ensure that there are comprehensive systems and processes for Service children moving into and out of a school that include identifying Service status, communication between current and future schools and support for the children transitioning.

Practice supporting this principle may include:

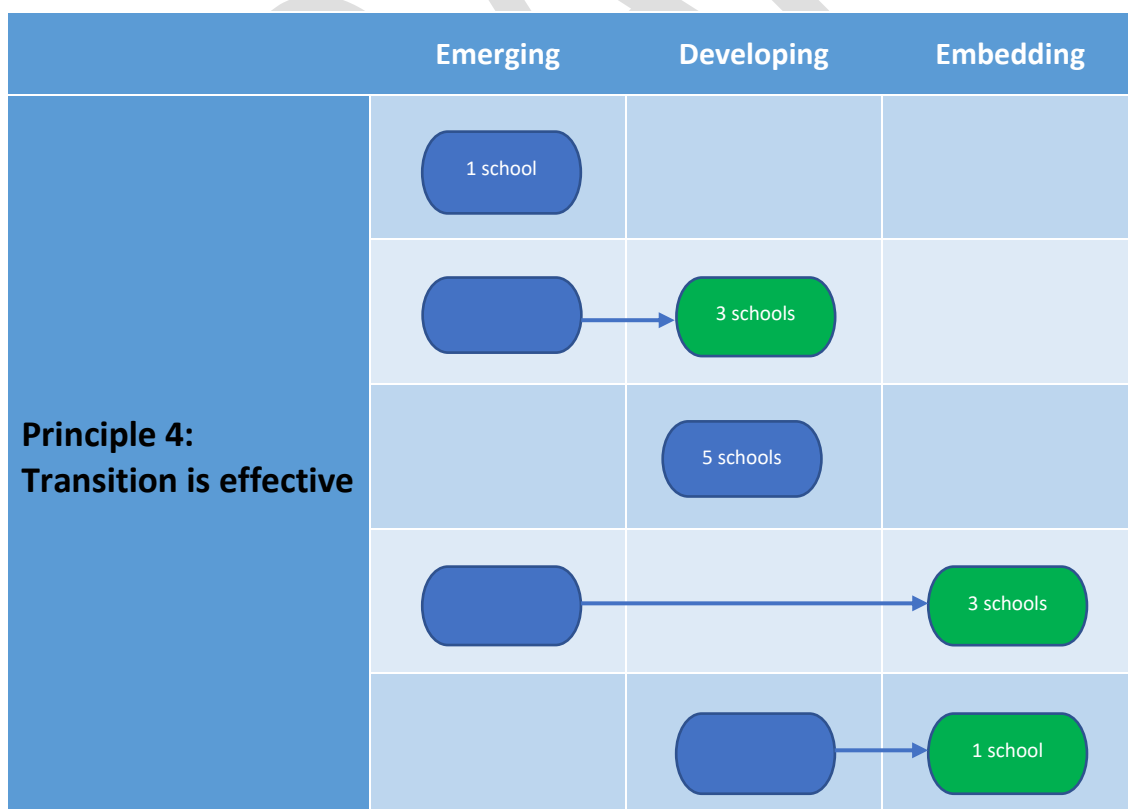
- *Identifying Armed Forces children on entry through admission processes*
- *Identifying current Armed Forces children through requests to parents for updated information*
- *A standing staff meeting item about Armed Forces children and any those joining or leaving the school*
- *Liaising with Armed Forces children's previous or next school*
- *Processes to ensure the first day goes particularly smoothly and an Armed Forces child feels welcomed, such as a buddy system (for both children and parents) and clear information for both child and parents*
- *A clear, regularly reviewed mobility policy*
- *Leaving and arriving rituals, such as songs in assembly or special booklets of memories to keep*
- *Arrivals and leavers display boards with photographs and affirming messages*

Seven schools reported that before engaging with the Toolkit their practice for principle 4 was emerging, twelve felt that their practice was developing, and one believed it to be embedded. By survey point there had been some clear shifts in levels of practice achieved with only one school reporting that their practice was emerging, eight believing that it was developing and the majority (eleven schools) stating that they felt their practice was no embedded (see Figure 10).

Figure 10 Schools' ratings of practice for principle 4 before using the Toolkit versus now

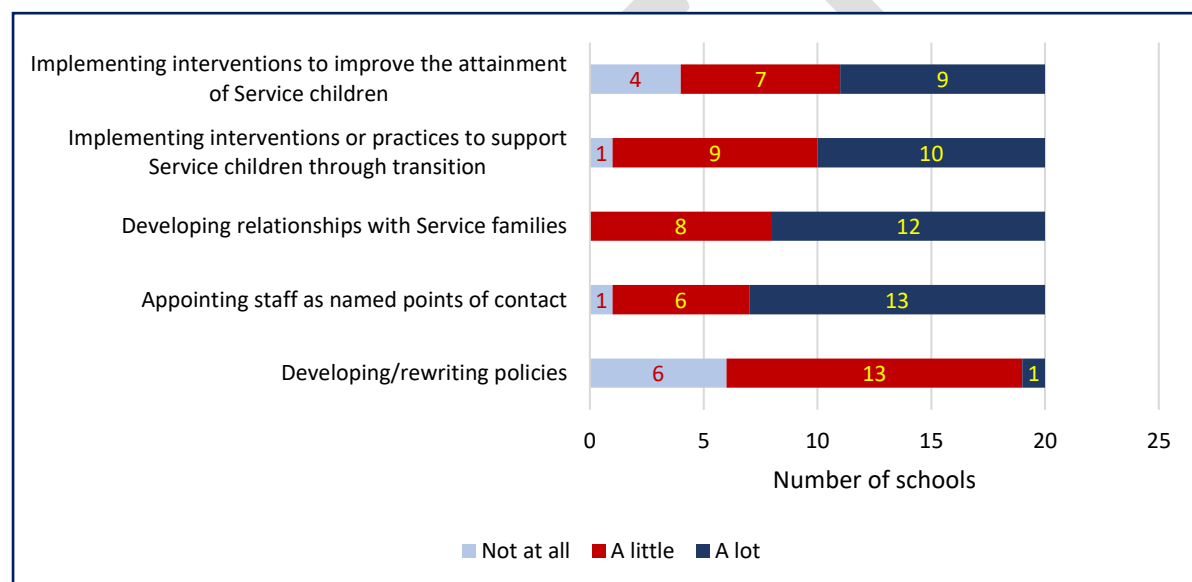


Whilst seven schools stayed at the same level of practice during their use of the Toolkit (1 at emerging, 5 at developing and 1 at embedding), thirteen were able to develop their practice with the majority of these making a move up from developing practice to embedding practice:



The activities related to this principle included implementing interventions to improve wellbeing and to support Service children through transition, developing relationships with Service families, appointing a named contact and developing/rewriting policies. As Figure 11 shows, having a named point of contact was the activity that most schools spent a lot of time on followed by developing relationships with Service families and then implementing interventions to support Service children through transition and to improve their attainment. Developing/rewriting policies was far less likely to see schools spending a lot of time on it, but 13 schools had spent at least a little time doing this.

Figure 11 Time spent on activities underpinning principle 4



Several perceived outcomes reported by schools may be related to schools engaging with these activities. Schools agreed that:

- Senior leadership have implemented policies and practices to support Service children.
- Senior leadership understand the importance of using the toolkit.
- Service families feel better supported.
- School staff are more confident in supporting Service children.
- School staff are more aware of the issues concerning Service children.

- Supporting service children is a key activity in school.
- School staff work collaboratively with other staff in our school to support Service children.
- Service children have improved well-being.
- There are stronger relationships between school and Service families.
- Service children are more engaged in class and in school generally.
- School staff know who the Service children in their classes are.

Principle 5: Children are heard

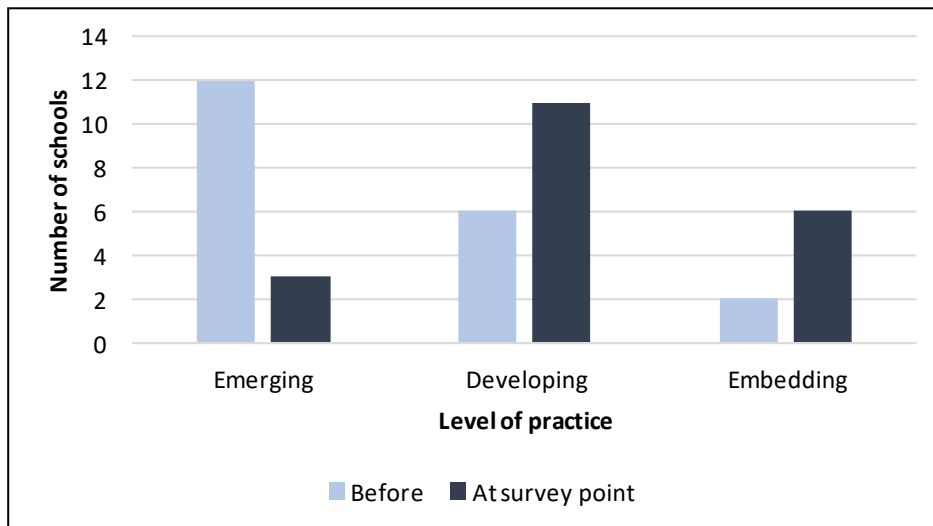
Principle 5 centres around the need for Service children to be listened to and understood, with their input being used to continually develop the support they receive. Principle 5 examples of good practice and descriptors for levels of practice include:

- *Specific arrangements are made in all student representation bodies to ensure Armed Forces children's voices are heard*
- *Armed Forces child involvement with local Armed Forces community forums and groups*
- *Facilitating sharing of Armed Forces child experiences through arts such as drama, picture books and poster displays*
- *Mechanisms for the school to capture views from members of Armed Forces child support groups*
- *Enabling participation in conferences and forums for Armed Forces children run by LAs, Armed Forces charities and universities*
- *Using surveys to gather feedback from families about induction procedures, concerns and school processes*
- *Ensuring Armed Forces children feel heard by documenting and celebrating how their views inform change*

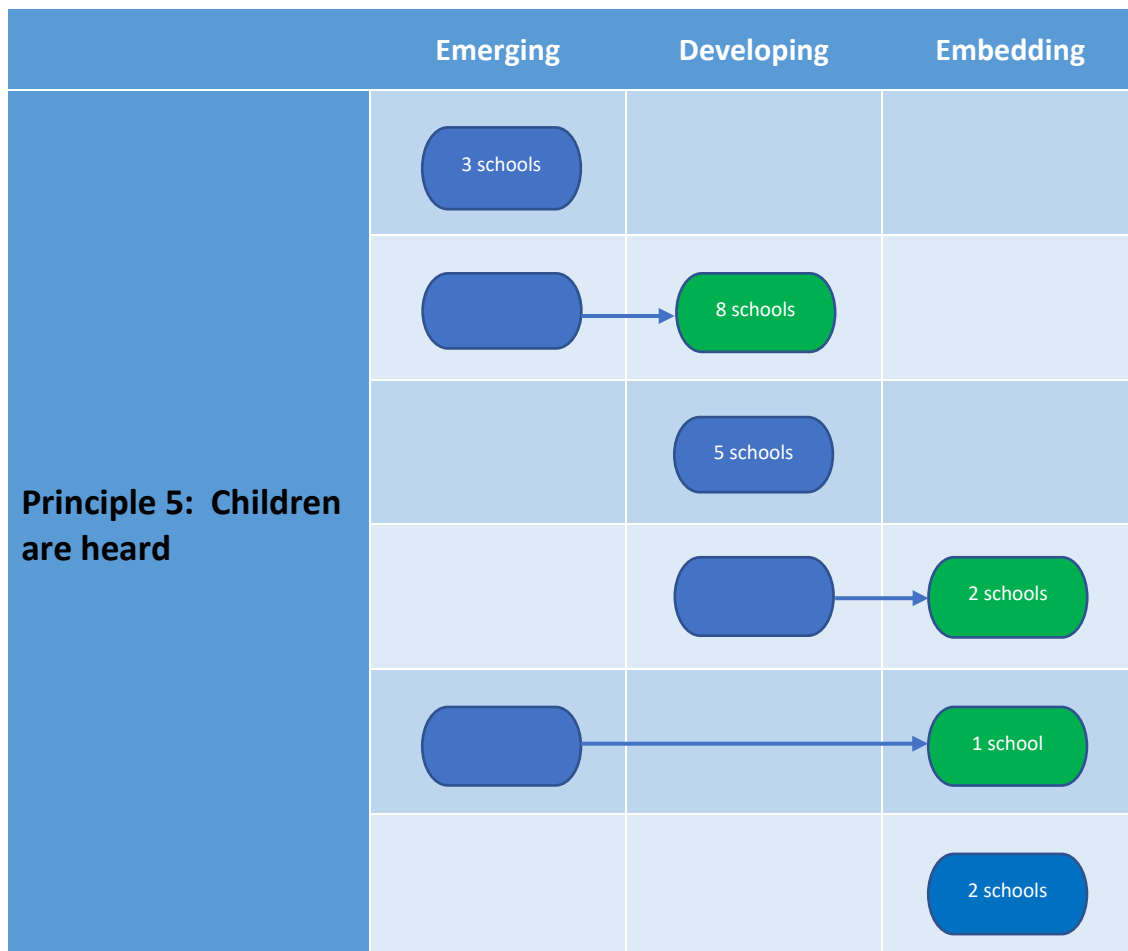
Schools reported that prior to engaging with the Toolkit their practice for principle 5 was largely emerging (twelve of the twenty schools rated themselves here). Six schools rated themselves as developing and only two felt their practice was embedding. By survey point

however there was a shift towards most schools reporting developing practice (eleven schools) with six reaching the level of embedding (see Figure 12).

Figure 12 Schools' ratings of practice for principle 5 before using the Toolkit versus now

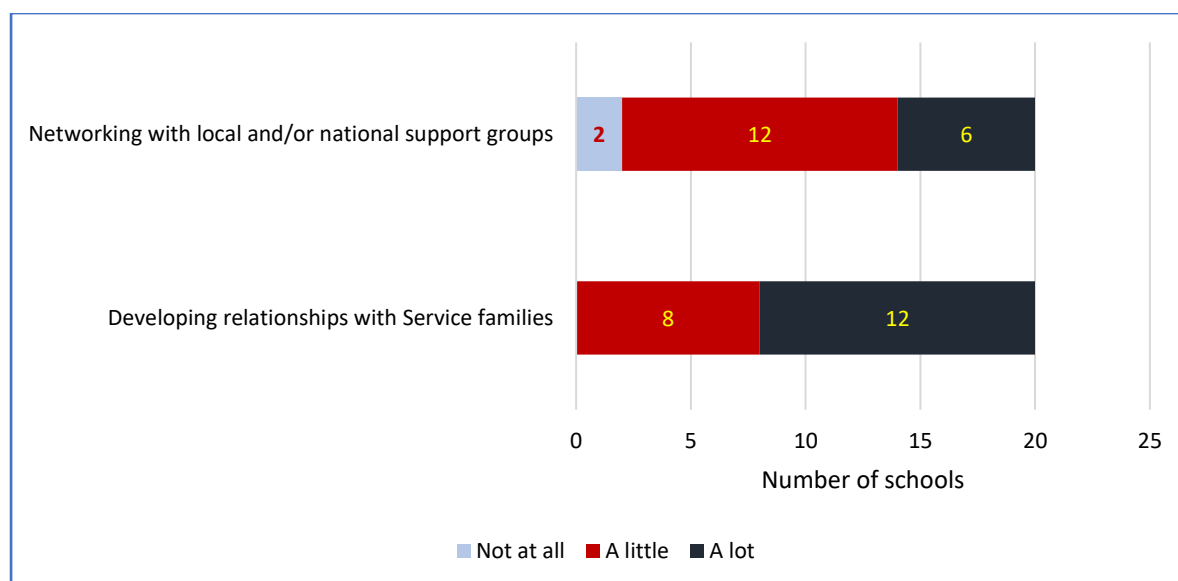


Several schools remained at the same level of practice but eight moved from emerging to developing and three moved from developing to embedding:



As Figure 13 shows, the activity which appears to have contributed most to progress on principle 5 is developing relationships with Service families which most schools (12) had spent a lot of time on, and the remaining 8 schools had spent a little time on. Linking into local and national support groups had also taken place with 6 schools spending a lot of time on this activity, 12 spending a little time on it and only 2 not spending any time on it.

Figure 13 Time spent on activities underpinning principle 5



The key outcomes which schools agreed they had perceived in relation to principle 5 were

- Service families feel better supported
- There are stronger relationships between school and Service families
- Service children are more engaged in class and in school generally.

Principle 6: Parents are engaged

Principle 6 places value on working in partnership with Service families which helps to foster feelings of inclusion and supports communication about transitions and deployment.

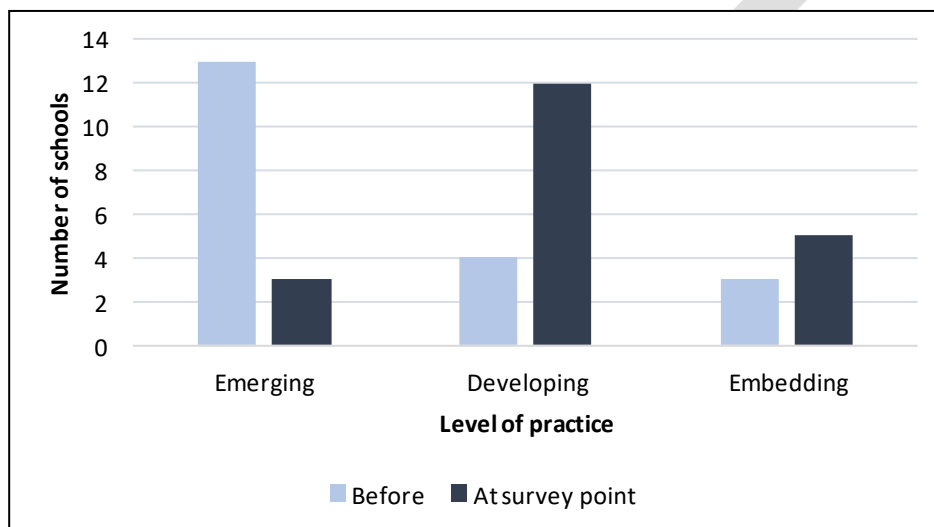
Examples of good practice for principle 6 include:

- *Workshops for parents*
- *Support groups for Armed Forces families*
- *Identification and support for parents' emotional health and wellbeing*
- *Virtual communication with the 'away-from-home' parent*
- *Employment of an Armed Forces family liaison officer*
- *Identifying and supporting young carers in Armed Forces families*
- *Supporting families with consistent behavioural strategies*
- *Signposting families to other sources of support*
- *Awareness of family circumstances*

- *A clear positive welcome to new Armed Forces families*

Before engaging with the Toolkit, most schools felt they were at the emerging level of practice (thirteen schools), with only four reporting that practice had been developing and three reporting that it had been embedding. Figure 14 displays the changes in levels of practice given by schools in the survey.

Figure 14 Schools' ratings of practice for principle 6 before using the Toolkit versus now

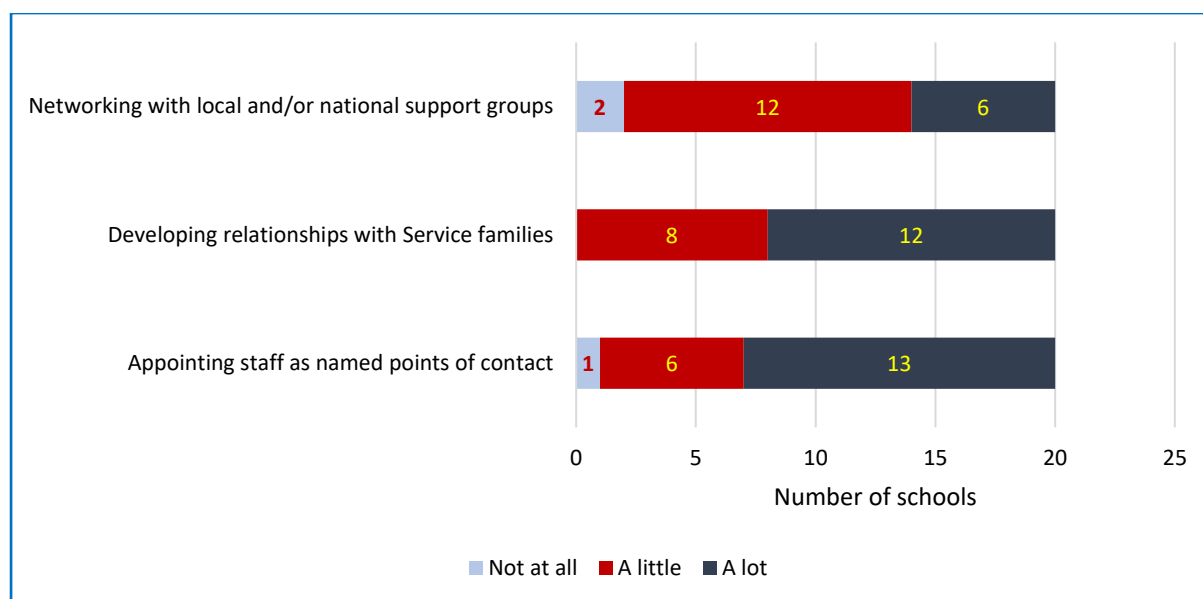


Three schools stayed at the emerging level of practice but eight moved up to the developing level and two went even further to the embedding stage. The four schools who started at the developing level did not move to the embedding level:

	Emerging	Developing	Embedding
Principle 6: Parents are engaged	3 schools		
		8 schools	
		4 schools	
			2 schools
			3 schools

Progress on this principle appears to have been underpinned by all schools spending at least a little time on developing relationships with Service families but the majority spending a lot of time on this activity, as was the case for appointing a named point of contact in Principle 1. It seems logical that these two activities would be closely interlinked with having a named point of contact facilitating communication between school and Service children and their families: a pre-requisite for developing relationships. Six schools also spent a lot of time linking in to support groups at local or national level (and 12 spent a little time on this) which is also likely to support the development of relationships by proffering access to support and resources for both school and Service families.

Figure 15 Time spent on activities underpinning principle 6



Schools working to develop communication and relationships with Service families is likely to be well-received by Service families. One parent described the excellent communication she had with her child's teacher at a previous school which allowed her to inform the teacher of parental deployment patterns - this was crucial for the teacher being able to understand the child's behaviour and provide appropriate support. However, a recent posting had moved them away and to a much larger school with an app which facilitated communication from school to parents. The parent had found it virtually impossible to communicate directly with her child's teacher about deployment and the impact this would likely have; this was very frustrating for her.

Schools agreed that the following outcomes had occurred in relation to implementing principle 6:

- Service families feel better supported.
- Service children have improved well-being.
- There are stronger relationships between school and Service families.
- Service children are more engaged in class and in school generally.
- School staff know who the Service children in their classes are.

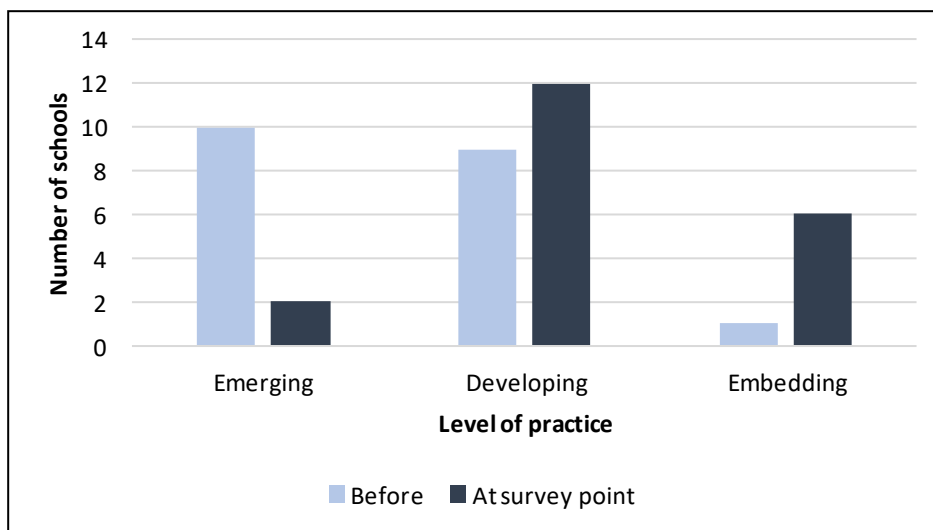
Principle 7: Staff are well informed

Principle 7 encapsulates the need for staff to understand Service children's unique circumstances and be able to draw on training, resources, and networks to support each Service child. Exemplar practice for principle 7 includes:

- *Designated senior member of staff responsible for ensuring regular training and dissemination of information for example on upcoming moves and deployments*
- *Training run by specialist pastoral support staff or by outside experts*
- *Supporting staff attendance at local or national conferences*
- *Membership of local networks and attendance at meetings and events to keep up to date*
- *Drawing on the knowledge of teaching and support staff from an Armed Forces background*
- *Arranging training on an issue of relevance to all children but of particular concern for Armed Forces children such as separation*
- *Provision of simple evidence based introductory resources for all staff to be able to understand and to open up conversation with Armed Forces children*
- *Working with other schools to create networks and share ideas*
- *Reaching out to nearby university outreach teams*

Schools reported that before they began engaging with the Toolkit, ten of them were at the emerging level of practice, nine were at the developing level and one was at the embedding level (see Figure 16). By survey point only two reported they were emerging, twelve reported being at the developing level of practice and six were at the embedding level.

Figure 16 Schools' ratings of practice for principle 7 before using the Toolkit versus now



Two schools remained at the emerging level of practice, six moved from emerging to developing and two moved from emerging to embedding. Five schools stayed at the developing level of practice and four moved up to the embedding level: two moved from developing to embedding and two moved from emerging to embedding.

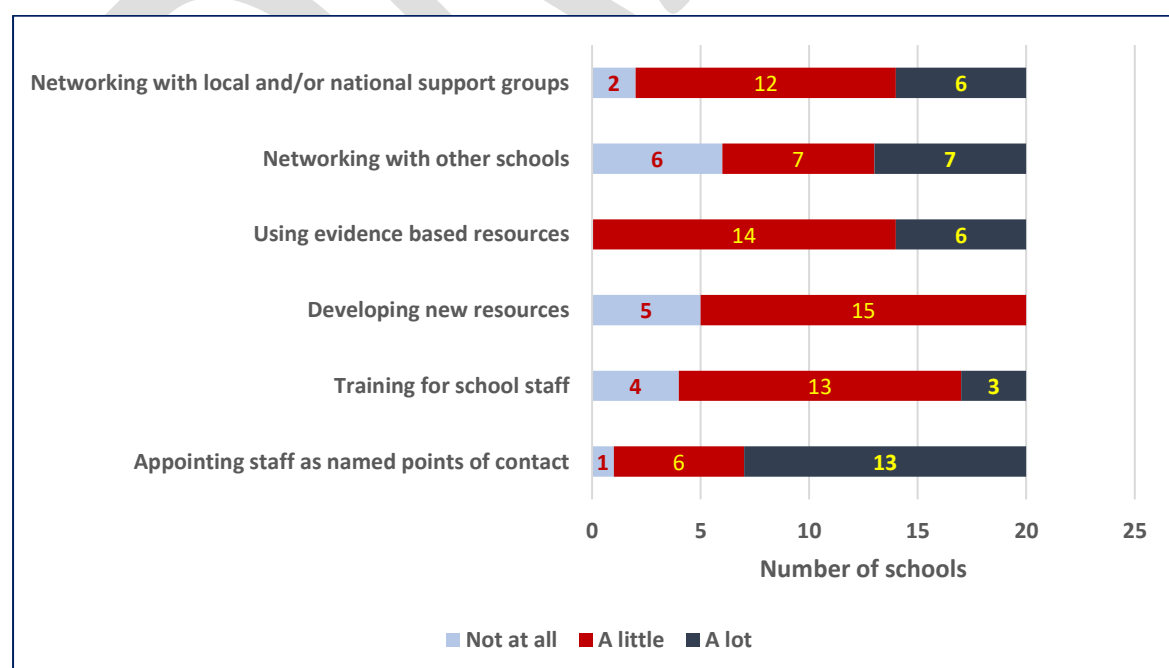
	Emerging	Developing	Embedding
Principle 7: Staff are well informed	2 schools		
	6 schools		
		5 schools	
		4 schools	
	2 schools		
			1 school

Again we can see that appointing a named contact was a key activity for most schools (see Figure 17) but typically schools had spent at least a little time on training staff, developing new resources, using evidence-based resources, networking with local and/or national support groups and networking with other schools (although this last activity saw the greatest number of schools -6- not spending any time on it).

Schools agreed that the following outcomes had been observed:

- School staff are more aware of where to find resources and help so they can support the Service children in our school.
- Senior leadership understand the importance of using the toolkit.
- School staff are more confident in supporting Service children.
- School staff are more aware of the issues concerning Service children.
- Supporting service children is a key activity in school.
- School staff work collaboratively with other staff in our school to support Service children.
- School staff know who the Service children in their classes are.

Figure 17 Time spent on activities underpinning principle 7



Discussion

Focus groups, interviews and survey responses all indicated that the Thriving Lives Toolkit had been perceived by schools as a positive and useful resource. The range of responsibilities placed upon schools and the types of provision schools are required to offer changes over time; this can mean that schools can find themselves without the knowledge or resources they need to deliver high quality provision to all their students as they might wish. In these instances, the development of frameworks and guidance on what constitutes good practice is beneficial simply because it allows them to identify what they are already doing well and develop action plans for development (e.g. Hanson et al, 2021; Robinson et al, 2022). In larger schools this can be especially important where staff across different departments may have some knowledge and skill, and be implementing good practice, but without senior leadership or appointed leads necessarily being fully aware. The importance of auditing practice was noted by schools in respect of the Thriving Lives Toolkit and led in some schools to development being written into school improvement plans.

All schools made some form of progress in implementing some, or all of the principles. Interestingly this was not necessarily closely related to the length of time they had been working with the Thriving Lives Toolkit; thus, time is beneficial, but not critical. Support from senior leadership, as has been found in the implementation of other frameworks in schools, is important and most schools who took part noted they had used evidence-based resources and support organisations to some extent.

The activity which most schools had been engaged with 'a lot' was appointing a member of staff as a named point of contact (an aspect of Principle 1 – Our Approach is Clear). The two other activities which many schools had been engaged with 'a lot' were developing relationships with Service families (an aspect of Principle 6 – Parents are engaged) and implementing interventions designed to improve wellbeing (an aspect of Principle 2 – Wellbeing is supported). Principle 1 (Our approach is clear) – which was the principle that most schools made progress with seems to have been progressed in large part by formally naming a member of staff as a point of contact. This act is important for clarifying

responsibilities, galvanising progress and improving communication within school teams and between the school and parents as can be seen by the increased engagement with parents and implementation of interventions designed to improve wellbeing. The importance of having a named point of contact was certainly noted when the Gatsby benchmarks were piloted in schools (Hanson et al, 2021) and is why schools have named leads for specialist provision such as Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Other than auditing their provision, schools were most likely to be engaged in appointing named contacts and developing staff awareness of Service children's issues and their presence in class. More than half of the responding schools were engaged to some extent in implementing interventions to improve wellbeing, transition effectiveness or attainment. Writing new policies and new resources were least likely to have been engaged with, but these findings are logical considering that these steps may be something a school would progress to once they have begun internal restructuring and made some 'quick wins'. It was pleasing to see that many schools had spent time on developing relationships with Service families and that this had resulted in Service families being perceived to be better supported.

More than half of responding schools were engaged to some extent in implementing interventions (primarily to support mental wellbeing but also to support effective transition and attainment). In line with the implementation of interventions was the indication that they have been spending some time networking with support groups (at the local and/or national level) and using evidence-based resources (presumably to identify impactful interventions). Activities which were somewhat less likely to have been engaged with were networking with other schools and implementing methods of monitoring and evaluation. Evaluation has been found in other studies to be challenging for schools to implement; in part because it requires a skill set that may not be readily available within the school and in part because it takes time and resources (e.g. Hanson et al, 2021).

The activities which fewest schools had spent a lot of time with were developing/rewriting policies and developing new resources; this is perhaps not surprising as the former is unlikely

to be done until work is under way planning for a new academic year and the latter requires confidence in existing resources as well as time.

The outcomes which respondents were most likely to agree they had observed were:

- that staff knew who the Service children in their classes were
- that these Service children were more engaged in class and had improved well-being,
- that there were stronger relationships with Service families
- that staff were more likely to be working collaboratively to support Service children.

Given the progress made on Principles 1, 2 and 6, and the activities which schools reported having engaged with most, this is understandable. Qualitative data supported the survey findings. Two schools described increased awareness of the issues Service children may face, in particular those surrounding the deployment cycle, and how this can manifest in these children requiring tailored support, e.g.:

"[There is] increased awareness that they [Service children] may have different needs and that the deployment cycle is quite complex with different stages which result in different emotions."

Further to this, one school believed that implementing interventions which allowed Service children to interact with each other in protected settings was particularly beneficial to those with behavioural concerns:

"Students with behavioural issues in lessons or other aspects of school life react differently when with other Service students both within school clubs and off site activities. Maybe because of the feeling of being an accepted part of a group with shared experiences and nothing to prove."

Implementation of the Toolkit, even if minimally, had resulted in increased awareness by staff of the experiences, issues and qualities of Service children and increased staff confidence in

supporting them. Schools perceived that Service children had improved wellbeing and were more engaged in class.

The outcome which was least likely to be agreed with pertained to the destinations of Service children 'Service children's post-16 destinations are improved'. This is a longer-term outcome than the others and is only relevant to Secondary schools and only for those Service children making post-16 or post-18 destination decisions, so it is not surprising that this outcome was less likely to have been observed. Another outcome which respondents were less likely to agree with was that of inter-school collaboration 'school staff work collaboratively or network with staff in other schools to help support...' – given the existence of regional hubs and the conferences which promote networking this is perhaps a little more surprising. It is possible that schools were predominantly making use of existing shared resources such as those made available by the SCiP Alliance, rather than forming links with other schools.

One outcome which was articulated by schools in both the survey and in interviews, related to the opportunity proffered by the Toolkit to audit provision, identify strengths and areas for development, and plan how to move provision forward:

"The most obvious benefit has been the ability to audit our provision and identify the strengths and weaknesses. The current environment is obviously quite hectic and doesn't leave much space for development of new initiatives but continuing to develop our provision is being built into the schools' development plan."

"The most useful thing we have found is how the toolkit allows us to identify what we have been doing and how we can move our provision forward. This has allowed us to write some of the actions into the school development plan and we have also significantly raised awareness in staff."

This echoes findings in previous evaluations of the implementation of frameworks - the evaluation of the pilot of the Gatsby Benchmarks for example noted that the framework of the benchmarks themselves was critical in supporting schools to understand what good

provision looked like and be able to audit themselves along the benchmarks helped them work strategically to develop provision (Hanson et al, 2021). Similarly, Robinson et al (forthcoming) found that when schools were provided with a framework to think about their provision for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, the practice of simply identifying what the school already did, and where it could develop, was one of the main beneficial outcomes.

Limitations

The nature of the research design and data collection means that these findings should be interpreted with caution. Although the qualitative and quantitative data produced similar findings, offering some validity and reliability, the small sample size, lack of a robust and rigorous research design for evaluating progress and impact in 'pilot' schools, and the short timeframe in which some schools had been working with the Toolkit means that there is over-reliance on subjective perceptions from schools. Longer term evaluation following schools progress via review of their self-assessments of Toolkit implementation, alongside metrics of behaviour, attainment and progression is needed to add support to the findings described here. A rigorously designed, longitudinal pilot with clear short-, medium- and long-term outcomes which are assessed alongside detailed case studies of schools efforts to implement the principles, such as done by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation and the Gatsby Benchmarks, would provide more detail and permit firmer conclusions to be drawn.

Conclusions

Findings suggested that schools viewed the Thriving Lives Toolkit positively, seeing the audit process as fundamentally important in identifying good practice and devising action plans. Schools were able to implement many aspects of the Thriving Lives Toolkit, often in short time frames, which led to progress being made on all seven principles, with many principles becoming embedded in several schools. The activities that most schools engaged significantly with were appointing a named member of staff as a point of contact (66% of schools), developing relationships with Service families (60% of schools) and implementing

interventions to improve the wellbeing, transition and attainment of their Service children (over 50%). The outcomes which schools realised because of implementing aspects of the Toolkit included increased staff awareness of potential issues and confidence in working effectively with Service children. There was typically (but not always) senior leadership support which was important for progress and in making supporting Service children a key activity. The result of this was an increase in Service children's wellbeing as perceived by school staff.

These findings provide tentative evidence for the efficacy of the Thriving Lives Toolkit in relation to improving provision and outcomes for Service children, at least in the short-term. There is a need now for a methodologically rigorous longitudinal evaluation of school's use of the Toolkit which draws on multiple data sources to evidence how the Toolkit is implemented and the outcomes and impacts this has for schools, Service families and of course Service children.

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Appendices

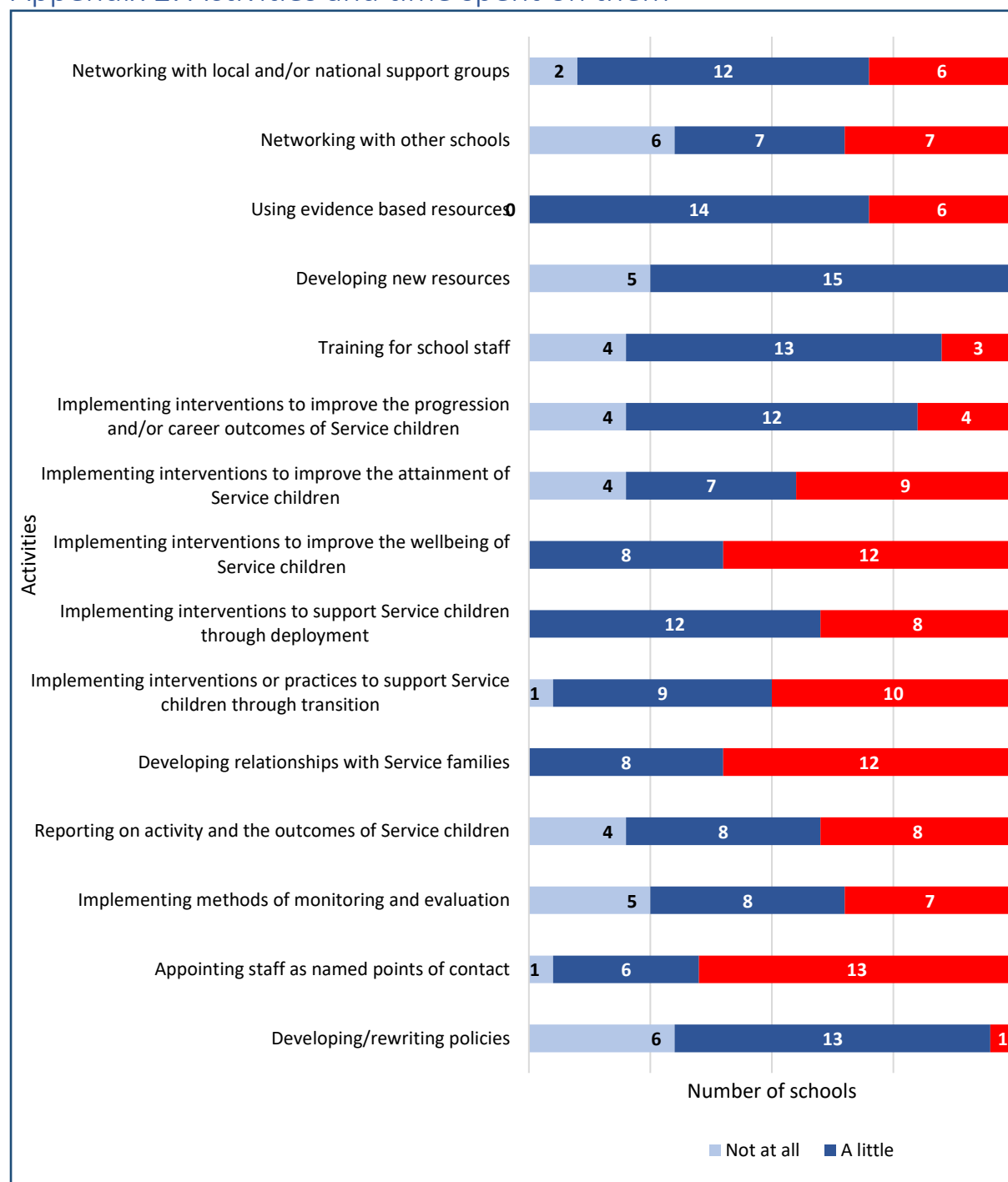
Appendix 1: Survey



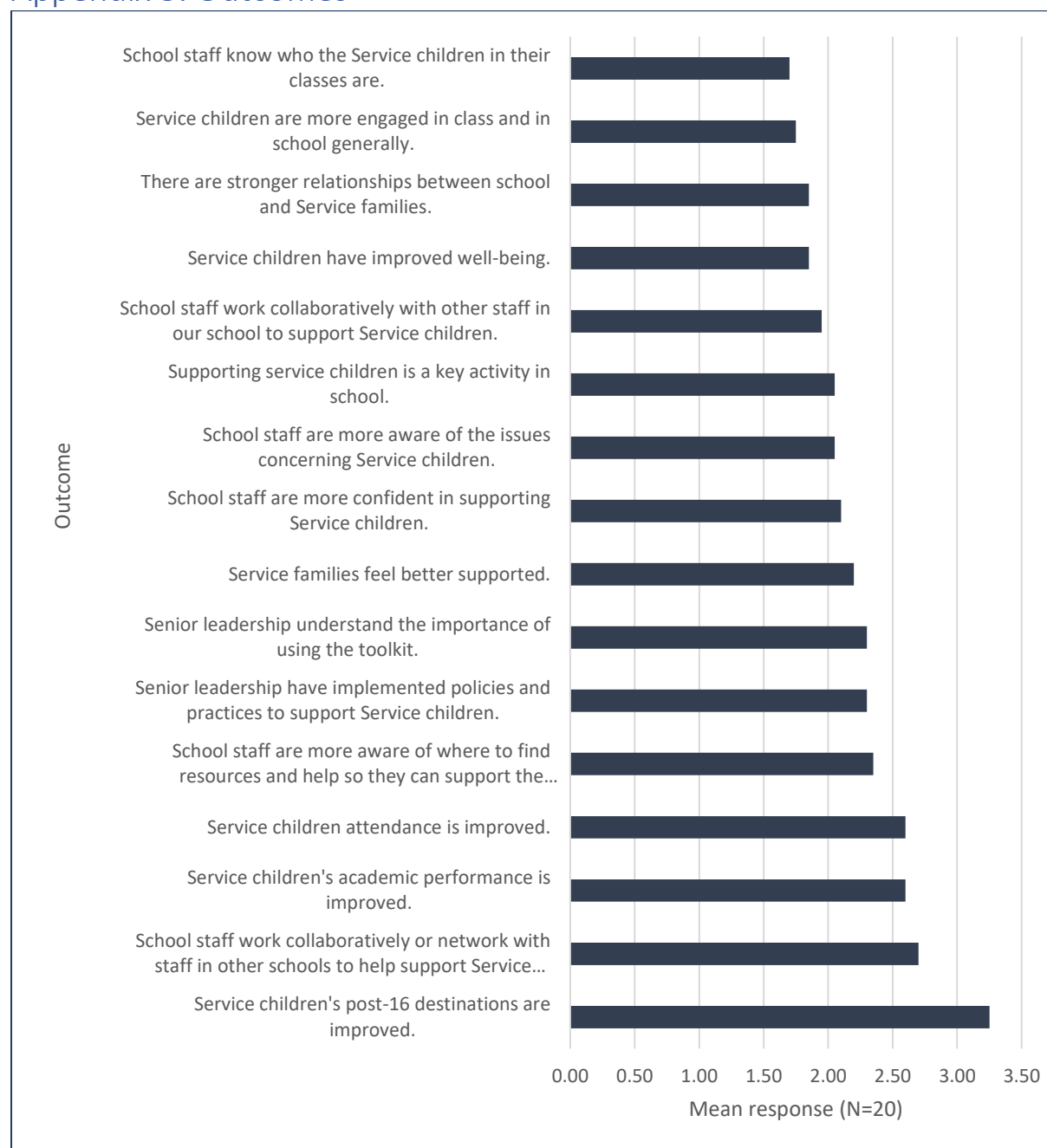
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Appendix 2: Activities and time spent on them



Appendix 3: Outcomes *



* The chart displays mean Likert response scores where the response scale was 1= strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = nether agree nor disagree, 4 = disagree and 5= strongly disagree. Therefore, **lower** scores represent stronger **agreement**, i.e. that outcome was observed.