

CASE STUDY

GATEWAY PRIMARY (4-11)



SCHOOL CONTEXT

Gateway Primary School typically has about 280 pupils on roll, almost 60% of whom are from Armed Forces families. Military parents predominantly serve at RAF Brize Norton, the UK's largest RAF Station. The Station is home to the RAF's Strategic and Tactical Air Transport and Air-to-Air Refuelling forces, as well as hosting many lodger and reserve units. It provides rapid global mobility in support of UK overseas operations and exercises, so parental deployment is a commonplace feature of school life. Pupil mobility is also **very** high. For example, 31% of children joined or left the school at non-standard times across the academic year 2022/23. A knowledgeable Family Support Worker oversees this mobility, along with many of the school's pastoral systems and tailored interventions aimed at military families. For example, she runs a daily 'Buddy Club' each lunchtime in a dedicated room called *The Hangar*.

MORE INFO:

<https://www.gateway.oxon.sch.uk/>

This case study identifies and describes the impactful role that a dedicated member of staff, acting as a point of contact for military families, can have on a school with a significant population of mobile Service children. It also emphasises the importance of having well-informed senior leaders and governors, who have a clear strategy in place for overcoming barriers for their military families but who review this regularly, adjusting spending decisions and policies as required.



<https://www.scipalliance.org/thriving-lives-toolkit>



SELF-ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE

Emerging practice	Developing practice	Embedding practice
Schools with emerging practice will be actively reflecting on their activity and may be implementing actions to enhance their support, but to a small extent. School leaders will be beginning to raise awareness of what is needed to support Armed Forces children and young people more effectively and will be reflecting on the impact of their existing support strategies to strengthen these.	Schools with developing practice will be addressing this principle's question to a good extent, but this may be partial or yet to be enhanced through regular monitoring and evaluation. School leaders will have considered how they are addressing this principle's question and are taking steps to embark on a regular programme of reflection, monitoring and evaluation. Practice at this level is likely to be either not fully embedded or consistently applied by all staff, or both.	Schools with embedding practice will fully address this principle's question with well-established work that is routinely monitored and evaluated and showing evidence of impact. School leaders will have fully addressed this principle's question and regularly monitor, review and evaluate their strategies to demonstrate the impact. Practice at this level will be both embedded and consistently applied by all staff.

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

1.1 To what extent are all those involved in leadership, governance and Armed Forces support aware of funding and other resources available to support Armed Forces children? - Whilst the school's Family Support Worker is a well-known staff contact for military families in the community, senior leaders (including the Headteacher) have a detailed knowledge of the school's Service families and the potential challenges they may face. All are fully aware of dedicated funding, both in terms of Service Pupil Premium (SPP) and occasional grants. At the time of writing, an Armed Forces Covenant Grant was providing some targeted play therapy for some Service children. - The Family Support Worker has an in-depth knowledge of additional sources of support and of a variety of organisations that provide helpful resources. She keeps up to date with developments with these. - The Governing Body has a strong understanding of SPP. Having RAF personnel representation on the Board ensures that this funding stream is regularly scrutinized and discussed.	EMERGING DEVELOPING EMBEDDING
1.2 To what extent do you monitor how dedicated funding is spent? - The school's SPP strategy has been created alongside its wider disadvantaged pupil premium strategy, and this is published on the school's website. It is also actively shared with parents and formally reviewed annually. The Governing Body is involved in this review. - Due to the school's significant pupil mobility, coupled with leaders' determination to intervene early to address any signs of pupil underachievement in core subjects, teaching staff undertake six termly pupil progress checks across the year, rather than the typical three. Sonar Tracker, an online pupil progress tracking and reporting platform, is used as the basis of pupil progress meetings: where necessary, funding decisions are adapted to address any concerns that emerge. - Each year, the published SPP strategy includes a clear evaluation of the effectiveness of spending decisions. Gateway's Service children typically perform as well as, if not better than, their 'non-Service, non-disadvantaged' peers. For example, at the end of KS2 in July 2022, the proportion of Service children reaching age-related expectations or better in reading, writing and mathematics combined was 64%, above the National Average of 59%.	EMERGING DEVELOPING EMBEDDING

1.3 To what extent is support informed by evidence and monitored for effectiveness?

EMERGING
DEVELOPING
EMBEDDING

- All support and interventions are rigorously monitored for their effectiveness, as are any bespoke projects funded through grants. A wide range of impact measures are considered in addition to Service children's academic attainment, including attendance data, take up of extra-curricular activities and wrap-around care, and feedback from stakeholders. Outcomes are shared widely with the staff team.
- Recent successes have followed policy and procedure changes, such as the Governing Board's decision to only authorise one day's leave for families reuniting after lengthy periods of parental deployment, whilst all other term-time holidays are recorded as unauthorised (unless covering strictly agreed exceptional circumstance). Following leaders' deliberate and widespread engagement with parents about this change, attendance rates have risen and are particularly high. Similarly, adjusting wrap-around care to make it more flexible led to much greater take-up.
- As such, pastoral support is a strength of the school and pupils' personal development was judged to be outstanding at the school's last Ofsted inspection in February 2023.

1.4 To what extent do Armed Forces family voices and Armed Forces representation inform those responsible for leadership, governance and Armed Forces support?

EMERGING
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EMBEDDING

- The Family Support Worker runs half-termly 'Hang at the Hangar' coffee mornings, with governor representation and wider community involvement. These sessions typically attract 15-20 parents and are an invaluable way of getting regular military parental views which are then shared with senior leaders. The sessions supplement the more traditional 'parental feedback' systems also used, such as an annual survey and a high visibility of key staff at pupil drop-off and pick-up times.
- There is Armed Forces children representation on all pupil leadership groups, such as the School Council and amongst the House Captains. 'Buddy Captains' have been introduced recently to strengthen the school's buddy system for new arrivals. Pupil voice is also included at all transition points.
- There is always a governor representative from the local Armed Forces on the Governing Body, and the parent-teacher Association, GSA, includes many 'military reps'. As such, senior leaders keep abreast of any relevant Station news and developments, including upcoming unit moves and deployments / exercises.

1.5 To what extent do those responsible for school governance ensure Armed Forces children's outcomes are monitored and appropriate support is delivered?

EMERGING
DEVELOPING
EMBEDDING

- Governing Body meeting minutes clearly evidence the challenge the Board provides school leaders in ensuring the school's Service children perform well and that dedicated funding is used effectively. Governors are supported in this core responsibility by being provided with a data pack ahead of each of the Board's six meetings a year, summarising the outcomes of the half-termly pupil assessments.
- When evidence suggests that changes may be beneficial, the Board acts quickly. For example, when the clear impact of the Family Support Worker could be seen, the postholder's hours were increased from part-time to full-time. Similarly, following the COVID-19 pandemic and a rise in family anxiety and school refusal, funding was acquired to employ a play therapist for a day a week in Autumn 2023. The therapist has been working with up to five children each day as well as supporting some parents; the headteacher describes the impact being seen as 'significant'.

1.6

To what extent do your admissions arrangements take account of Armed Forces families' frequent, mid-term and short notice moves?

EMERGING
DEVELOPING
EMBEDDING

- As a maintained school, Gateway Primary follows its Local Authority admissions policy. However, this is done with flexibility to ensure admissions are made as quickly as possible. All information for parents is easily accessible from the school website, and office staff are quick to support prospective families.
- The Family Support Worker always makes an initial phone call to new parents prior to their arrival, as well as to their children's previous school(s). As well as helping gather key transfer information and workbooks to share with teachers ahead of an incoming pupil's first day, this approach allows the staff member to find out things about the family that she can refer to later which helps families settle and develop a sense of belonging – the 'inconsequential' stuff.
- The well-connected Family Support Worker, with strong links to the local HIVE and RAF Community Development Officer team, ensures that information about potentially disruptive moves coming up are known as soon as possible and shared with relevant staff so that they can prepare the pupils for them.

SCHOOL LEADER ADVICE

The whole school team works hard to create a strong sense of community and caring, positive relationships are a critical part of this to help families gain a sense of belonging and commitment. The Headteacher speaks of being part of something 'big and warm', thereby allowing the school's transient population to quickly feel part of Team Gateway.

“Pupils are flying high at this thoughtful and caring community school...There is a deliberate effort by school leaders to overcome the contextual barriers faced by service families, and all pupils settle quickly due to the exceptional support, guidance and clear expectations that run through the whole of the personal development programme.”

(Ofsted February 2023)