

CASE STUDY

ALEXANDER FIRST SCHOOL (3-9)



SCHOOL CONTEXT

Educating Nursery to Year 4 pupils, Alexander First School is situated in an area of MOD housing in the heart of Windsor, Berkshire. The school has about 100 children on roll, of which about 80% are members of military families serving predominantly in the Welsh or Coldstream Guards. As such, many children join the school having previously been taught in Welsh. There are also sizeable Fijian and Gambian communities; overall, about a third have English as an Additional Language (EAL). Mobility is high with families typically staying for just two years and up to a third being mobile in a typical year. Staff turnover is also high since the school's leadership actively seeks to employ Service spouses in support staff roles. Governors consider this to be a moral duty. School leaders pride themselves on the school's pastoral offer and its research-based curriculum, living up to the motto: *Acquire knowledge, prepare for the future, research in action.*

<https://www.alexanderfirst.co.uk>

This case study outlines the school's rigorous approach in ensuring its tailored and bespoke support for Service children is influenced by reaching out, and listening, to their parents. Being the recipients of two national awards for attachment and nurture, staff are extremely well placed to offer highly effective pastoral care to its many military families.



MORE INFO:

<https://www.alexanderfirst.co.uk/service-children>

[Our Community at Alexander First School - A celebration of the military child](#)

<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

6.1 To what extent do you provide support to Armed Forces families?	EMERGING DEVELOPING EMBEDDING
• Prior to admission, a proforma is used with prospective parents to ensure that key information is gained. This is particularly around each transferring child's previous educational experiences, any pending referrals that may have been made, curriculum schemes recently used and any SEND needs. • Weekly 'baby and toddler' group sessions, and 'Toast and Talk' sessions (shared breakfast with children and parents/carers), are hosted by the school's Nurture Lead and family worker. These help to build a strong understanding of individual family circumstances. • Teachers and senior leaders have daily check-ins with all new families in the first few months to ensure they have settled. The school's <i>Class Dojo</i> pages enable parents / carers to contact staff and engage in shared discussions irrespective of location / time differences. This online communication platform also provides access to weekly newsletters, on-going school updates and class posts to keep up to date. • The Headteacher works closely with Unit Welfare staff to anticipate when Service pupils / families may need term-time leave. This includes spouses employed by the school. The school's pre- and post-teaching interventions mean that any absent pupils are supported in keeping up with the curriculum. • All parents evenings are carried out on-line to allow remote access for Service parents / carers away from home. Special events such as performances are uploaded to <i>Class Dojo</i> pages so those unable to attend can still enjoy the event retrospectively. • The school hosts regular SPLAT sessions for parents (Stay, Play, Learn All Together) in which information / support / signposting is provided on a specific theme (e.g. reading; supporting your child with good sleeping routines; understanding ASD etc.). This is followed by an opportunity to join their child in the classroom to understand better celebrate they learn in school and how they are supported.	

6.2

To what extent do you help Armed Forces families build strong relationships with each other and with the school community?

EMERGING
DEVELOPING
EMBEDDING

- School staff provide regular opportunities to help its military families meet and engage with one another, as well as encouraging them to take an active part in the school community. For example, weekly 'baby and toddler' sessions run, with free snacks and refreshments. A Boxercise class, with childcare provided, enables parents / carers to access an activity without the added concern of child cover.
- Additionally, the school hosts termly 'Mum's Night Off' events in which staff volunteer their time to have pupils in school between 5pm & 7pm for themed activities / events (e.g. movie night, games night, quiz night etc.) whilst mums / carers are invited to come together in the school hall for an evening of adult company with food (e.g. pizza, fish and chips etc.) and their themed event (e.g. bingo, quiz night, games etc.). Staff plan these sessions particularly around longer deployments, with Unit Welfare support.
- The school actively seeks family views on what they need from the school and how they can best engage with the school community, for example working with Unit Welfare to establish a book club.
- Serving personnel are regular visitors in support of the school's curriculum:
 - An annual 'Military Child Week' specially aims to raise the profile and engagement of the military community. It draws on the expert knowledge of farriers, musicians, tailors and padres.
 - A Music Week enhancement opportunity enables the musicians from the Welsh Guards to share their knowledge, experience and passion for music.
 - Padres from both Regiments lead regular assemblies, as well as participating in a Religious Studies Week. This provides opportunities to share the link between faith and military service.
 - During Careers Week, military personnel with varying job roles are invited to share their talents, passions and roles with pupils.
 - Unit Welfare staff regularly participate in the life of the school, particularly in celebratory events such as judging competitions like Easter bonnets, pumpkin carving and the yearly talent show.
- To celebrate the school community's wider cultural, religious and linguistic identities, staff run an International Week each year during which countries of the military community are studied (e.g. Fiji, Nepal, Wales, Gambia and Jamaica). Parents / carers are invited to share stories, songs, rhymes in their native languages, foods and their schooling experiences from their native home. On the final day of the week, children are then invited to come into school dressed in clothes representing their own culture.
- During Religious Studies Week parents / carers are invited to share their own religious beliefs.

6.3

To what extent do you liaise with parents and if appropriate local Armed Forces personnel about deployment and mobility?

EMERGING
DEVELOPING
EMBEDDING

- Senior leaders and teachers are always available at the school gates during pupil drop-off and collection times to ensure parents / carers are able to informally communicate with them. The 'intelligence' gathered complements information accessed at the bi-weekly meetings that school leaders have with military welfare staff to ensure they are up to date with moves and deployments. This allows staff to put extra provisions and support into place at times of greatest need. Commanding Officers and padres (some of whom are also school governors) also provide information and updates, as necessary.
- The Headteacher attends the Borough's Armed Forces Forum to keep up to date on information and circulates this back via newsletters and posters (e.g. how to access MOD wraparound funding).
- School leaders map out school events around upcoming deployments so that parents evenings, school plays / pantomimes and sports events can be planned with consideration to Service parents' availability.

6.4

To what extent are deployments, separation or impending moves shared with all staff appropriately?

EMERGING
DEVELOPING
EMBEDDING

- Nurture practitioners and Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA) regularly share up-coming events and information with class teachers, and staff weekly newsletters / weekly overviews of activities and events includes information on deployments, separation or impending moves. These are shared with all members of the school team, including admin and lunchtime supervisory staff. A communal deployment **display** is in place in the school hall and updated regularly.
- Senior leaders deliver regular staff training and updates on the school's Service community which includes guidance over supporting children with the challenges of high mobility and parental absence due to deployment. Staff understanding and the school's evidence-informed pastoral provision are strengths: the school has been awarded the Attachment Aware Schools Award, which means all staff are trained in trauma and attachment, as well as the National Nurturing Schools Award, which means that staff are fully trained on attachment disorder which is often prevalent amongst Service children.
- Staff use a data system to track changes in children's emotional wellbeing and share this with par-ents/carers to identify changes in pupils' emotional and social needs. When appropriate, this is then used to establish interventions and support parents with collaborative approaches.
- The Headteacher leads regular sessions on supporting Service children at Brunel and Kingston Universities. This ensures all undergraduates who do placements at the school have an initial understanding of Service children's educational and social needs.

6.5

To what extent do you support Armed Forces children to communicate with a parent when they are away?

EMERGING
DEVELOPING
EMBEDDING

- A deployed parent receives daily / weekly posts on their child's Class Dojo page so that they can continue to be kept informed of their children's progress and achievements. Additionally, the affected child keeps a deployment book 'whilst you are away' to record his / her achievements so that they can then be shared and form the basis of a positive reunion – this is also shared on the Class Dojo page.
- School staff encourage families to use the Reading Force charity's offer to support family connectedness. Take up is good. Led by ELSA-trained support staff, the school also uses the Little Troopers charity's programme to support children during deployments and school moves.
- Staff are proactive in enabling effective communication between children and their deployed parents. A deployment board is in place and regularly updated to include locations, time differences and interesting facts about countries that parents have been deployed to.

SCHOOL LEADER ADVICE

'Whilst serving a military community presents some unique leadership challenges, I believe that when applying a blend of compassion, inspiration and understanding, school leaders can create a thriving and impactful Service school that prepares students for success in both academics and life. At the heart of this lies fostering a sense of friendship and mutual respect among staff, students and parents.'

●● Strong relationships create a supportive environment where everyone feels valued and motivated to excel. Maintaining open lines of communication with all stakeholders, including students, parents and higher command, encourages a spirit of pride and unity within the school community.' (Headteacher)