

CASE STUDY

HARWELL COMMUNITY PRIMARY (4-11)



SCHOOL CONTEXT

Harwell Community Primary is a Local Authority-maintained, one-form entry school of about 200 pupils located in a village in the south of Oxfordshire. Pupils from Armed Forces families make up a very small proportion of the school's learners, typically under 5%. Some of these children's parents work at nearby Vauxhall Barracks in Didcot, currently home to The Royal Logistic Corps which provides logistic support functions to the British Army. Occasionally, some of the school's Armed Forces parents work at one of the county's RAF stations. The school's part-time, non-class-based SENCO also has strategic input into Pupil Premium spending, including any tailored support provided to those children eligible for Service Pupil Premium.

<https://harwellprimaryschool.co.uk>

This case study outlines the school's impressive approach to ensuring tailored and bespoke support for its Service children is influenced by reaching out, and listening, to their parents. This approach has been strengthened through an Armed Forces Families Fund grant from the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund, for a 2023-24 project involving seven local schools led by Harwell's SENCO (the Didcot Schools Service Collaboration). The school's focus on pupils' personal development is a strength, recognised by external partners and appreciated by parents.



<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? - The school's SENCO is also the dedicated member of staff in terms of liaison with Armed Forces families, and she has a strong understanding of each family's circumstances. She aims to meet with the family before any Service child(ren) start, and is regularly present at the school gate, along with the Headteacher, during pupil drop-off and pick-up times, allowing targeted communications to take place. - The SENCO formally meets with the school's military parents to gain a better insight of each Service child's lived experience, feeding information gleaned back to relevant staff. For some of these meetings, a specific date is offered and accepted and for others the parents select a date and time convenient to them; where a face-to-face meeting proves difficult to schedule, a virtual meeting is held. This flexibility recognises the challenges of military life, especially in relation to work-related parental absence. - As a result of the <i>Didcot Schools Service Collaboration</i> project, Armed Forces parents are now asked to complete a 'Strengths and Difficulties' questionnaire, with the responses used to shape any bespoke pastoral support for their children, as well as review the impact of any support provided. Assessments can be scored electronically through SDQ membership. - Where appropriate, Armed Forces parents are signposted to effective support for emotional health and wellbeing needs, such as Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) involvement and a local young carers charity, Be Free YC. In the recent past, Armed Forces children have access to a range of pastoral support mechanisms, including therapeutic interventions provided by a local drama company.	EMERGING DEVELOPING EMBEDDING
6.2 To what extent do you help Armed Forces families build strong relationships with each other and with the school community? - Harwell Community Primary School's staff provide regular opportunities to help Armed Forces families meet and engage with other families and to take an active part in the school community. This is mainly through the school's strong universal offer which includes many community events, such as parents being invited in at the end of each of their children's class projects to hear about their work ('Class Outcome' sessions), as well as access to holiday clubs and after-school clubs. At the time of writing, one military parent was an active member of the school's parent-teacher association, Harwell School Association. - Through regular informal communications with parents 'at the school gate', the more formal parent-SENCO meetings and the use of 'Strengths and Difficulties' questionnaires, school leaders ensure military parents voices are sought, heard and then acted upon. - As part of the school's celebration of the military, serving parents at the two local army bases are invited in from time to time to speak to the children about their jobs, and the schedule for assembly themes across the academic year includes references to the Armed Forces.	EMERGING DEVELOPING EMBEDDING

6.3

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

EMERGING
DEVELOPING
EMBEDDING

- Leaders, including the School Business Manager who supports the school's pastoral work, do all that they can to find out about any parental deployments. This is achieved through ongoing dialogue with military family members, particularly as a result of the policy of always having senior leaders at the school gate during pupil drop-off and pick-up times. Class teachers contribute to the picture through their own pupil voice. Strong communication, feeding into pastoral support, is prioritised.
- Having a military parent on the school's governing body, along with two teaching assistants who are members of military families, supports the gathering of relevant intelligence over forthcoming deployments and possible postings.

6.4

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

EMERGING
DEVELOPING
EMBEDDING

- All relevant staff are regularly updated about information regarding any Armed Forces families' changing circumstances. This recently included the deployment and postings of a serving stepfather of a child who does not attract Service Pupil Premium funding, but whom the school treats as a Service child. CPOMs, an innovative software safeguarding, pastoral and wellbeing reporting system, is used to record and share such important information.
- Whilst the level of parental deployment and postings is minimal, due to the very small number of military families at the school, staff receive relevant professional development during INSET days and staff meetings, such as training on the school's emotional interventions. The SENCO intends to draw on the SCiP Alliance's Thriving Lives Toolkit online training resources to raise all staff members' awareness of the emotional cycle of deployment.

6.5

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

EMERGING
DEVELOPING
EMBEDDING

- Harwell's children, including its small number of Service pupils, know how to access support from staff. This includes visiting The Nest, the SENCO's base, or speaking with the trained ELSA. For younger children, staff are proactive in enabling supportive communication.
- A 'soft landings' room is available to any child finding the start of the school day challenging, and a play therapist visits the school once a week and will work with Service children if they have been identified as needing this targeted support.
- The school has a number of bespoke strategies in place to support its Armed Forces children to communicate with a deployed parent. For example, one child brings in a teddy which has her father's face printed on it.

SCHOOL LEADER ADVICE

Sense of belonging and identity are important to Service children - celebrating them, their culture, their interests / skills and their experiences. Try and find opportunities for Service pupils to share their experiences with their peers. Through pupil voice it has become very clear to us that Service pupils want their friends / peers to have a better understanding of what it is like to be a Service family. The children have also expressed that they want to be better understood through a discrete support system, and just having someone there that understands is important. We have found it helpful to raise awareness further among all staff too to increase their understanding of the distinct nature of a Service lifestyle.