

CASE STUDY

PLYMSTOCK SCHOOL (11-18)



SCHOOL CONTEXT

Plymstock School is situated in Plymouth, Devon, close to Her Majesty's Naval Base at Devonport and belongs to the Westcountry Schools (Academy) Trust (WeST). There are approximately 1500 children on roll across Key Stages 3 and 4, of which 184 (12%) have at least one parent serving in the military, predominantly the Royal Navy, with a few serving in the Army and RAF. A small sixth form caters for approximately 180 children of which less than 10% come from a military background. Mobility is low, with most military families settled in the area. Some serving parents travel long distances to their places of work, for example, to Scotland and Portsmouth. Service children at the school are described as "a resilient cohort with a strong work ethic" although some face significant challenges broadly in-line with those described by national research. The highly experienced Coordinator of Service Families (CSF) - who is a history teacher and middle leader, with military ties herself - manages data, support for Service children and their families, and keeps staff well-informed of situations and needs. A wider pastoral team is responsible for the welfare and pastoral support for Service children under the guidance of the CSF who reports directly to the senior leadership team.

<https://plymstockschool.org.uk/>

MORE INFO:

<https://plymstockschool.org.uk/service-families-parents>

Plymstock School's ambition is to empower young people, through education, to have the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in life and make a positive difference to their communities. Its vision is 'Achieving Excellence through Curriculum and Culture' and its values are 'Be Kind, Work Hard, Aim High'. This case study describes how leaders at Plymstock School provide timely communication for Service children, their parents and staff to enable it to deliver on the Armed Forces Covenant and ensure primarily that all staff and governors understand their needs at key times. Of particular note is the embedded whole-school approach to ensuring that all staff in a large school know their children well and are kept well-informed.



<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

7.1

To what extent do you have a named point of contact to help staff support Armed Forces children and families?

EMERGING
DEVELOPING
EMBEDDING

- The CSF oversees all matters to do with Service children and drives related whole-school processes although some, for example, the admission arrangements and transfer of records, are carried out by the administration department.
- On admission to the school in September, Service children are identified using DfE data, transition information and internal records. Their background is highlighted on the school's Management Information System along with other key information, for example, SEND, EAL, FSM and/or LAC. This information is then shared with **all** staff including the CSF, Heads of Year and Tutors. The CSF makes contact with all new Service children and their parents to make herself, and the support available, known.
- Outside the normal admission round, a new Service child is quickly identified. The CSF, Head of Year, Tutor and Data Manager are all informed. The CSF meets 1-to-1 with the Service child and makes contact with his / her parents. Any additional needs are quickly identified.
- The school has developed a *Know Your Class* document which details the unique circumstances of every tutor group and teaching group. All teaching staff are expected to know their classes, and individual children, well and this is routinely monitored and evaluated by senior leaders. The CSF reports that "**all staff have the information they need but don't have what they don't need**". Consequently, it is rare for a member of staff not to know a Service child's background or needs.
- All Service children and their parents have direct access to the CSF and are openly encouraged to make contact – in person, by email or by phone – if a need arises.
- Despite the high number on roll, the CSF knows all Service children well, has developed strong relationships with them and clearly acts as a secondary attachment figure for them.
- The school has produced a ***Service Pupil Intervention and Support*** note for staff which is sent out to all staff in mid-September, to new staff when they join the school and at key times, for example, in times of conflict (e.g. Ukraine, Gaza).
- The CSF runs three weekly club sessions for Service children and, if appropriate, their close friends: a *Mentoring Club* on a Monday and Friday, and a *Craft Club* on a Tuesday. Access is open to all Service children. As part of the DoE Award scheme and as a Giving Activity to add to their *Sixth-Form Passports*, trained sixth-form Service Mentors support the CSF with the running of all three clubs. The clubs are often well-attended, particularly in times of need – for example, when conflicts arise or during deployment - and are a means for the CSF to get to know Service children and their family circumstances. The CSF and Service Mentors pass relevant information to key staff.
- Strong three-way chains of communication between the CSF, Heads of Year and Tutors ensures that changes in family circumstances are known and effective support planned.

7.2

To what extent do you provide appropriate time for professional development around Armed Forces children?

EMERGING
DEVELOPING
EMBEDDING

- The CSF leads **Continuing Professional Development** (CPD) for all staff on an annual basis. CPD focuses on ensuring that staff know and understand the unique challenges faced by Service children and the best way to support them in times of need.
- A senior leader provides support for new teachers when they join the school and trains them in whole-school systems and processes, including the role of the CSF and managing Service children.
- All staff have a copy of the *Pastoral Handbook*, within which is a section on Service children.
- Senior leaders routinely monitor and evaluate the provision for Service children along with other identified groups of children.

7.3

To what extent do you ensure that all staff and those with responsibility for school governance have access to high quality training about supporting Armed Forces children?

EMERGING
DEVELOPING
EMBEDDING

- The school was involved in the development of the original *Thriving Lives Toolkit* and has continued to use it to support its ongoing self-evaluation.
- The school helped produce some of the secondary materials for the *Military Kids Club* (MKC) Heroes organisation. The CSF has shared these materials with other local secondary schools.
- The CSF keeps up to date with evidence-based developments, for example, through national research and the work of the Family Federations, Armed Forces charities and SCiP Alliance.
- The school has a *Heroes Room*, which is an important aspect of the provision for Service children. The *Heroes Room* is used for 1-to-1 sessions, for example, with new Service children, during exams or in times of need, communicating with serving parents when they are deployed, and training Service Mentors. The CSF describes it as a safe space, 'a haven', where Service children can 'have a moan about anything they need to, for example, the MoD (for deploying their parent), a teacher, a friend or their home life'. In addition, the room has a small library – with military themed books – and a map of the world on which Service children can place pins to show where their serving parents are deployed. All staff are aware of the use of the *Heroes Room*.
- The school's pastoral lead reports directly to the full governing body. Governors are provided with information about the Service cohorts, including data on mobility, attendance, behaviour and achievement. Governors monitor the use and impact of the Service Pupil Premium (SPP) Funding.

7.4

To what extent do staff apply research and evidence-based resources in their support for Armed Forces children and families?

EMERGING
DEVELOPING
EMBEDDING

- The CSF is fully aware of the research and evidence-based resources available and, when necessary, makes effective use of high-quality resources like *Living in their Shoes*, *Kin and Country* and *Family Federation* publications.
- The school has strong links with **Reading Force**, a national charity aimed at uniting families during deployment and sharing the joys of reading. The school library is involved in the initiative.
- Whenever possible, Service children are encouraged to participate in local and national initiatives, for example, by getting involved on *Armed Forces Day*. Two children have won the Diana Award in the past for producing a short documentary on deployment.
- The school website has a dedicated **page** for Service children and their families. This provides valuable information about the provision on offer by the school, contact details for the CSF and signposts to other supportive organisations.
- The successes and achievements of Service children are celebrated in *Staff Bulletins*, *Student Bulletins* and *Parent Newsletters*.

7.5

To what extent do staff engage in local and national networks focused on supporting Armed Forces children and families?

EMERGING
DEVELOPING
EMBEDDING

- The CSF has led CPD for other local secondary schools to share good practice and has disseminated the secondary materials for the Military Kids Club (MKC) Heroes organisation.
- Whenever possible, the CSF attends training events, both locally and further afield.

SCHOOL LEADER ADVICE

It is vital that leaders charged with championing the needs of Service children fully understand military life. Ideally, they should come from a military background themselves and/or have military ties, so they've experienced first-hand the mixture of pride and fear that comes with the lifestyle. People who haven't been there don't understand, they simply don't understand!