

CASE STUDY

COTTESMORE ACADEMY (4-11)



SCHOOL CONTEXT

Cottesmore Academy is located 'behind the wire' at Kendrew Barracks, Rutland, in the East Midlands. The school is a member of the Rutland Learning Trust, a small multi-academy trust of twelve primary schools. There are approximately 165 pupils on roll, although the school experiences significant pupil mobility: for example, numbers were closer to 130 at the end of the summer term, 2023. Virtually all children (98%) are members of Armed Forces families, with most serving parents linked to the two regular infantry battalions of the Royal Anglian Regiment: the Poachers and the Vikings. The latter moved to Kendrew from Cyprus over the summer of 2023 when 49 pupils left the school and 89 arrived. Shortly after arriving, many of the Vikings' soldiers were deployed to a variety of European locations. Additionally, a few serving parents work at the barrack's Headquarters (e.g. the Desert Rats) and at RAF Wittering in neighbouring Cambridgeshire.

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

This case study describes this school's systematic 'arrivals and departures' procedures with their clear aim of minimising the negative impact of moving schools. Support is provided for the whole family, and the importance of the school's Transition Support Officer is emphasised.



<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

4.1

To what extent does your school identify Armed Forces children?

EMERGING
DEVELOPING
EMBEDDING

- One of the first questions all new parents to the school is asked is whether they are members of the Armed Forces community. The school's admissions form also requests supplementary information on which regiment serving parents belong to (as different units function differently and this information allows staff link up with the right welfare teams) and the personnel's rank.
- Regular opportunities are provided for parents to meet informally to build confidence in the school's offer and to get to know one another. Invitations to special school events are guided by soldiers' timetables, with Wednesday and Friday afternoons used particularly frequently since these are typically allocated to sport and secondary duties.

4.2

To what extent do you work with outgoing and incoming Armed Forces families through the long transition process?

EMERGING
DEVELOPING
EMBEDDING

- A key post within the staff team is a dedicated Transition Support Officer, a member of the school's pastoral team, who oversees the clearly documented school-to-school mobility procedures.
- From an administrative perspective, the arrivals process usually starts with a phone call about school admissions from a prospective parent, leading to a quick process of emailing an application form and then offering a school place, if available (which is typically the case). A *Welcome Pack* is then sent to the parents, with the office manager then working through a checklist. Parental queries are managed by the Transitions Officer who also sends an offer letter and creates new pupils' files in the school's Management Information System.
- In recognition of the significant impact that school to school transition may have on the whole family, the headteacher and SENCO met families in Cyprus ahead of a large regimental move in 2023. Parental feedback about this was very positive, as it helped their children to settle quickly. All staff are aware of the Transition Cycle and receive training updates on effective practices as part of their CPD.
- For departing children, as soon as the office is notified, a leavers' pack is worked through with each child. Informal 1:1 sessions result in a booklet for the child's new school being completed, as well as a review of the new school's website being undertaken. One page of the booklet asks, 'What I would really need to know?' aimed at new teachers, which the Transition Officer completes with each child.
- Effective welcome and farewell routines have been established at the school. Possibly the most impactful of these is a personal letter from the headteacher to each new child, accompanying a welcome booklet of information about the school and details of the new child's allocated buddy.

4.3

To what extent do you welcome Armed Forces families, both before and after their moves, and ensure a positive experience from the first day?

EMERGING
DEVELOPING
EMBEDDING

- The school's *Arrivals Flowchart* starts three weeks before a family joins the school and continues for three weeks after the new child starts attending. On notification of a new family joining, the Transition Officer makes contact and **before** the child arrives, his/her new class teacher and a formal buddy are assigned. A photograph of this buddy is added to a booklet for each new arrival, and this is sent to the child with a personal letter from headteacher.
- A school tour is provided whenever possible, led by a senior leader. New children are invited to join this, which usually finishes at the new child's class where the child's buddy awaits. On the child's first day, and with parents' consent, the school's **arrivals board** displays the child's name, and everything is ready for him/her. A 'Cottesmore Pupil Pledge' exists identifying a range of cultural capital opportunities that children can expect to experience whilst at the school; a parents' version is under development.
- The flowchart identifies various 'check-ins' between staff and each joining child and his/her parents, thereby ensuring that any issues are identified and resolved as soon as possible. A formal meeting with parents takes place after a child's first few weeks, usually face-to-face although phone calls are used when more convenient to the parents.
- During a recent large-scale unit change, the school was opened at the end of the summer holidays to welcome new families who had not been able to visit beforehand, giving them a tour and an opportunity to meet teachers (with all staff attending). Access to wider services such as school meal providers, *Visions* (which supports help across the county) and mental health school team, was also provided.

4.4

To what extent do you work with Armed Forces children's previous or future schools to transfer records and find out about learning, wellbeing, achievements, interests, skills and their family context?

EMERGING
DEVELOPING
EMBEDDING

- Each joining child's previous school is contacted as soon as possible requesting a copy of the statutory Common Transfer File (for those transferring from schools in England). Additional educational records are requested for all new arrivals, including details of any safeguarding concerns. These records are chased, if not forthcoming. Where appropriate, contact is also made with the relevant unit welfare officers to gather information that might assist in the child settling into school life.
- All concerns are routinely and robustly followed up by staff, especially safeguarding concerns.
- For departing pupils, the school's approach is to send to the receiving school what it would like to receive when pupils join Cottesmore Academy.

4.5

To what extent do you minimise discontinuity in additional support, for example by minimising re-assessment of needs?re-assessment of needs?

EMERGING
DEVELOPING
EMBEDDING

- Direct contact is made by the school's SENDCO with relevant staff of schools that Cottesmore children with special educational needs and / or disabilities (SEND) have just left or are moving to.
- School staff endeavour to build on children's previous assessments of needs. Additionally, within two weeks of arrival, each child is assessed diagnostically to identify any significant gaps in learning and / or areas of particular need. For core subjects, standardised tests are used for this purpose.
- There can be challenges when children transfer from an overseas MOD school due to different services that have been available and the NHS in Rutland. However, the SENDCO works closely with Rutland County Council's (RCC) SEND team, and MOD Service Children's Assessment of Need (SCAN) documents are accepted and, in time, converted to Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). Continuity of support is provided whenever possible. For example, a child who was partially sighted had specialist equipment provided swiftly by the relevant Local Authority SEND team. In another example, high needs funding from RCC was in place for a pupil with significant needs **before** the child arrived at the school.

4.6

To what extent do you help Armed Forces children build new and maintain existing relationships?

EMERGING
DEVELOPING
EMBEDDING

- School leaders are acutely aware of the impact that moving schools can have on friendship groups and Service children's social and emotional development. Consequently, Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) time is available as an intervention for targeted children.
- Part of the school's daily routine is the use of emotional check-ins: children are encouraged to add their named 'emotion doll' to the relevant colour-coded basket at the start of each morning and afternoon. Those expressing unhappiness or anxiety are then picked up by staff and supported.
- An extra-curricular deployment club is provided each week, allowing children to talk about their feelings and support one other.
- Each week, some pupils act as Kindness Ambassadors. The other children do not know who these are. They meet with the school's staff Behaviour Leader and nominate two children to receive a post card of thanks, sent to their home addresses, in recognition of acts of kindness to others.

SCHOOL LEADER ADVICE

'Try and find out more about the regiment each child's parents are in because this will provide useful information about the child's lived experience and what their life will continue to be like. Not only will this help the school to provide tailored provision, but it acknowledges the child's identity, showing each child that you care about them. Furthermore, it helps access the right unit welfare teams who can provide invaluable support to both the school and the family.'

(Headteacher)

This was my children's fourth primary school move and by far the most thought-out transition. The children all received a personalised letter with a picture of their new teacher and a picture of the allocated child that would help them settle into their new classes. The school was very clear in what information they needed for the transition and kept in touch with me in the lead up to the children moving. For one of my children, it didn't look as though there would be room in the year group for her, but the school communicated with me often on the matter and informed me as soon as a place was available. There is nothing that I can personally think of that would have helped with the transition. The Cottesmore academy team has been faultless!"

(Parent)