SUPPORTING SERVICE CHILDREN IN SCHOOL IN WALES

A BEST PRACTICE GUIDE - UPDATED AUGUST 2018

LIVE ON

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The Royal British Legion is at the heart of a national network that supports our Armed Forces community through thick and thin – ensuring that their unique contribution is never forgotten. We were created as a unifying force for the military charity sector at the end of the First World War, and still remain one of the UK's largest membership organisations. The Legion is the largest welfare provider in the Armed Forces charity sector, helping veterans young and old transition into civilian life. We help with employment, financial issues, respite and recovery, through to lifelong care and independent living. In 2015/16, we responded to over a million requests for help – more than ever before.

For further information, please visit: **www.britishlegion.org.uk**

For support, call our helpline on 0808 802 8080. We're open 8am-8pm, 7 days a week.

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FOREWORD

The Royal British Legion is at the heart of a national network that supports our Armed Forces community through thick and thin – ensuring their unique contribution is never forgotten. That community is not limited only to those who wear or once wore a uniform. Armed Forces personnel make tremendous sacrifices to serve their country – but so too do their families including their children who are the focus of this new guide.

Having a parent away from home on deployment, often in dangerous situations and for long periods of time, can have a tremendous impact on a child's wellbeing. The Legion is aware that some Service children are still disadvantaged in their access to and experience of education as a result of a parent serving in the Armed Forces, and we hope the following guide can help show what can be done to address these disadvantages and improve the lives of Service children.

It is vital that children of serving Armed Forces personnel have access to the help they may need due to the unique pressures they may be facing. The Legion's 2016 Welsh manifesto outlined what we felt was needed to support Service children in Wales: additional funding for schools to support Service children and improved identification of Service children so that schools are aware of their situation and can provide support if required. Like the Armed Forces community as a whole, we know the majority of Service families and children are happy and enjoying the benefits of life in the 'Armed Forces family'. However, we must all ensure that should issues arise, appropriate support is in place.

We hope this guide will be invaluable in supporting Service families that access education in schools in Wales, and help them navigate the range of support services available. For schools and other partners, we outline some key best practice from across Wales which should be equally relevant to schools with small and large numbers of Service pupils. In Wales we are very lucky to have the Supporting Service Children in Education Cymru (SSCE Cymru) project which has been raising awareness of the potential challenges that affect Service children in Wales. Their resources are excellent and should be promoted widely.

I hope the issues and examples of best practice highlighted in this publication will help motivate and inspire you to ensure that Service children are fully supported to achieve their true potential.

Antony Metcalfe
Wales Area Manager,
The Royal British Legion

INTRODUCTION

This guide is for all who have an interest in improving the provision of education to Service children in state maintained schools. It contains information and guidance for education providers; be they local authorities running admissions procedures, or schools and teachers themselves, who educate Service children every day. All local authorities in Wales will have Service pupils enrolled in their schools so this is an issue of relevance to all, not just those areas with a large and visible military presence.

There is also information for parents of Service children, explaining what they should expect and where to find extra guidance should they need it.

The purpose of this guide is to:

- Highlight the issues of most concern to Service pupils and their families;
- Explain what help already exists and the current responsibilities of government and education providers;
- Provide examples of best practice from across Wales.

The Legion is not alone in working to improve support for Service Children and works with other charities – such as MKC Heroes and Reading Force who both feature in this guide – other organisations, the Families Federations, and Welsh Government to address it. This guide will help direct those in need of help to the best solution should they encounter problems.

Supporting Service Children

In 2011 the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant were enshrined in legislation as a result of campaigning by The Royal British Legion. Since then, national and local governments, and over 1,500 businesses, charities and other organisations have now committed to ensuring that the key principles are upheld:

- Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services; and
- Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given the most, such as the injured and the bereaved.

Today, every local authority in Great Britain and a number in Northern Ireland have made a public pledge to uphold and implement these Covenant principles.

This guide builds on the excellent work and resources delivered by the **Supporting Service Children in Education Cymru (SSCE Cymru) project**. The SSCE Cymru guides for **schools** and **parents** provide a wide range of information and support and this guide does not seek to replicate, but build on such resources. The Legion appreciates that many schools have their own support services that Service children are able to access and hopes this resource can be used to support these.

Whilst the bulk of education will be delivered by schools, there are other education providers, both formal and informal, where children receive education and learning. Any work to increase awareness around the potential support needs of Service children will of course be welcome in these settings too.

ESTIMATES OF THE NUMBER OF SERVICE CHILDREN IN THE UK

Estimates from Ofsted report *Children in Service Families, 2011, page 8*

Guides for Schools and Parents: **http://www.sscecymru.co.uk/toolkit-events**

SSCE Cymru Project

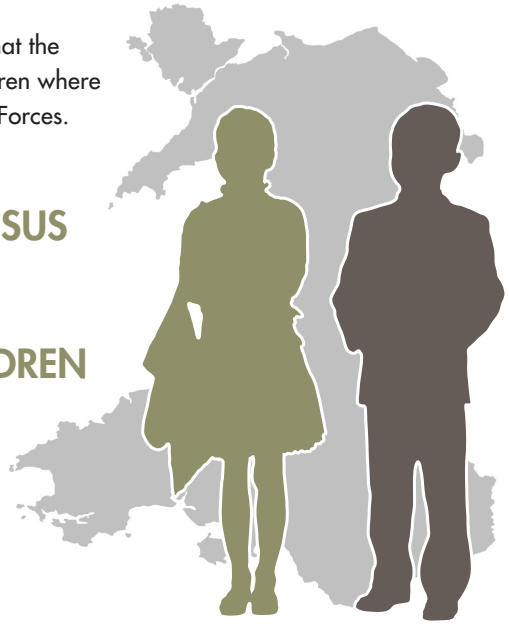
SSCE Cymru is a Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) project, established in 2014 which raises awareness of the potential challenges Service children in school in Wales can face as a result of deployment or moving home/school. The project, funded via the Ministry of Defence Education Support Fund (ESF), aims to give schools and local authorities a better understanding of the potential needs Service children may have and strengthen links across Wales to help develop and share good practice.

www.sscecymru.co.uk
Email: **info@sscecymru.org.uk**

SERVICE CHILDREN IN WALES – QUICK FACTS

The 2011 UK census found there were 2,486 children in Wales where the Household Reference Person (HRP) stated that they were serving in the Armed Forces.

It should be noted however that the census failed to capture children where the non-HRP is in the Armed Forces.



2011 UK CENSUS
2,486
SERVICE CHILDREN IN WALES

CHAPTER ONE

ADMISSIONS

Finding and securing a school place for a Service child comes with unique challenges that non-Service families do not routinely face. For Service families, navigating the school admissions process should be no different to that experienced by their civilian counterparts if it is done at the same time as every other family. However, Service families often find themselves struggling with the process because they are forced to move house and school outside the standard admissions timetable. Service life can require a high degree of mobility for families, and parents who serve will find themselves being moved around the country, and indeed the world, on a timetable over which they have little say.

When a school move must take place in the middle of an academic year, when places have already been allocated to all other non-Service pupils, a separate admissions process must be used. This is known as 'in-year admissions' and Service families have reported difficulties in navigating their way through the process.

Information on school admissions is available here:
http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/admissions-and-appeals-code/?lang=en

Why in-year admissions are difficult for Service families:

1. In many parts of Wales, places at some schools are in high demand, regardless of whether you have applied in line with the standard admission timetable or in-year.
2. When a Service family is searching for a school place in-year, it can be difficult to find schools with available places to accommodate more pupils. When these schools reject in-year admissions from Service children, this forces the family to look further afield for a school place.

In-year admissions can also complicate matters for schools. In 2015 the SSCE Cymru project conducted a survey of a sample of schools in Wales who had Service children as pupils. Feedback suggested that in many cases, schools were informed too late that a child would be arriving or leaving them, making it difficult to put support in place and to plan accordingly.

What are the current rules on school admissions?

In Wales, school admission authorities are responsible for admission arrangements. The admission authority for community and voluntary controlled schools is the local authority, whilst the admission authority for voluntary aided schools is the governing body. Admission authorities must comply with the Welsh Government's School Admission Code and the School Admission Appeals Code (see page 11).

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RULES ON SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

For infant classes in Wales, a limit of 30 pupils applies to class sizes (Reception, Year 1 and Year 2). However, Service children are classed as 'Excepted pupils':

Where certain types of children (excepted pupils) cannot be provided with education at the school in an infant class in which the limit is not exceeded without a relevant measure being taken which would prejudice efficient education or the efficient use of resources, those children are not to be counted for the purposes of ascertaining whether or not the limit of 30 pupils is exceeded.

Excepted children include children of Armed Forces personnel who are admitted outside the normal admission round.

Extracts from the Wales School Admissions code:

For children of UK Service personnel:

- 'School places must be allocated to children and their families in advance of the approaching school year if accompanied by an official Ministry of Defence (MoD) letter declaring a return date. Admission authorities also 'must not refuse a place to such a child because the family does not currently live in the local authority area'.

Admission authorities must:

- Ensure that the needs of the children of these families are taken into account.
- Allocate a school place in advance, if the applicant would meet the criteria when they move to their destination;
- Invite a Service representative to join the admissions forum;
- Accept a Unit postal address for applications from Service personnel in the absence of a new home postal address.

Admission authorities must not:

- Reserve places for blocks of these children.
- Refuse a place to such a child because the family does not currently live in the local authority area.

What this might mean for Service families:

- For Infant class sizes in Wales – if you move to an area, a school is able to admit Service children outside the normal admissions round even if the class-size limit of 30 pupils has been reached. School admissions rules for infant class sizes in Wales say that children of Armed Forces personnel are classed as 'excepted pupils'. This means that when a school is looking at whether a class has exceeded the limit of 30 pupils, Service children should not be counted. This helps ensure Service children can be admitted into a class even if the maximum of 30 pupils has been reached.
- Admission authorities must accept a unit address as proof of address when applying for a school place in advance of the move taking place. This is useful if a family knows they are moving but does not yet have a home address.

Points to remember: The Excepted pupils criteria applies to infant class sizes only. It does not apply to those years beyond Year 2, pupils entering secondary school, veterans or those families that are not based in the locality where they are applying for a school place. Service children are not given any additional priority under the guidance, when placed on a waiting list for a school, though provisions are in place to ensure support as outlined on page 13.

For secondary school admissions, Service children in Wales are not provided with any additional status and though there is no statutory limit on class sizes for secondary school classes, schools are encouraged to maintain classes of no more than 30. If schools are full, they do not have to make any exception for a Service child automatically. There is an independent appeals process where admission is refused which families can follow. Information can be found in the admissions code – see link on page 11.

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES

Llantwit Major School:

When a new Service pupil arrives at the school they are introduced to the Partnership Officer, who is the main link for Service pupils. They are shown where this member of staff is based and are told about all of the support the school offers throughout their time in school.

If a family are being posted, this member of staff will meet with the pupil to go through the new information from the school such as the names of the staff they will meet, their new uniform, or differences in the curriculum. The pupil is then given a document to fill out information about themselves – their likes and dislikes, things they excel in, things they feel they could improve on. This is for their class teachers so that staff can learn a little more about the student to make the transition as smooth as possible. This helps to break down barriers and helps the child learn a bit about the school and the school learn more about the child.

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council:

Neath Port Talbot work hard to support Service families and children, providing assistance with school admissions before families arrive in the area. The local authority have worked with a number of Serving families who are relocating to the area and who have contacted them whilst still overseas, to ensure they can make plans and arrange schooling for their children in plenty of time. This has allowed families to submit school applications before they arrive in the area, giving the family peace of mind and giving schools time to plan for their arrival.

Neath Port Talbot also ask the question on their school admissions forms in order to identify Service children so that should families arrive 'in-year', the admission authority know they are Service children. The local authority also use software that allows them to collect data and provide accurate information on the number of Service children in schools, ensuring there is awareness of them.

Further information – The Schools admissions code and appeals code is available here: **http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/admissions-and-appeals-code/?lang=en**

Further assistance for Service families:
Professional support and guidance is available to parents with admission queries from the Children's Education Advisory Service (CEAS), part of the Ministry of Defence's (MoD) Directorate Children and Young people (DCYP). The CEAS provide valuable information on school admissions and many other matters and maintains a telephone and online helpline for parents of Service children with queries.

Email: **dcyp-ceas-enquiries@MoD.uk**
Website here: **https://www.gov.uk/guidance/childrens-education-advisory-service**

Help is available from the three service **Families Federations**. They help many families with queries relating to schools and can help talk through the processes and provide advice:

Army Families Federation: **www.aff.org.uk**
Naval Families Federation: **www.nff.org.uk**
RAF Families Federation: **www.raf-ff.org.uk**

Families can also contact their local **admission authority** whose Admissions officers can help with queries and provide more detailed advice specific to the area or school.

Additional learning Needs / Special Educational Needs – If your child has ALN / SEN the MoD advises parents to contact the CEAS – contact details can be found on the website: **https://www.gov.uk/guidance/childrens-education-advisory-service**

CHAPTER TWO

SERVICE CHILDREN'S WELLBEING

The lives of Service children may be more stressful than those of their civilian peers. The high mobility and frequent house and school moves that can come with a military career can be destabilising for all the family, especially the children. Not all Service children find it challenging and there are huge positives that come with the lifestyle, but regular moves can make it difficult to settle in school, to make new friends, and to have access to a consistent curriculum.

Of far greater impact, however, is the effect on a child of the deployment of a parent, whether on an operational tour, training or postings abroad. It is in these times that anxiety peaks and a heavy emotional toll can be placed upon Service children. Prolonged periods of separation from a parent is an upsetting experience in itself, but add to that the knowledge that a parent may be in harms way while on deployment and the emotional strain on Service children at such times can be severe.

Work by the SSCE Cymru project in Wales in 2015[1], which sought feedback from schools themselves, found that Service children can face disruption to their social and emotional wellbeing. Schools in Wales said that Service children can face problems such as:

- Difficulties settling into a new school;
- Difficulties making friends;
- Feeling isolated
- Feeling worried about a parent who is on a deployment;
- Having to adapt to a different curriculum or having to repeat learning or having gaps in their learning.

Research from the Army Families Federation in 2015 also found that a higher proportion of Year 10/11 pupils reported that they had no-one to talk to if they were worried about something. A majority of parents also felt their child required additional support while the serving parent was deployed[2].

Action is already being taken in some schools across Wales to reduce any negative impact of Service life on the emotional wellbeing of children and to reduce the disadvantages they face. Schools already do much work to promote emotional literacy and it is important that such support takes account of Service children.

[1] Service children in Education in Wales: A study of available data on numbers and provision. WLGA, SSCE Cymru, MoD. September 2015.

[2] The Educational attainment of Army Children. Noret, Mayor et al. York St. John University. 2015

In Wales, schools are not currently required to identify Service children and collect that data for the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC). It is therefore possible that schools have little or no data about how many Service children they have enrolled in the school. As a result, they may be unaware of the strain some Service children can be under, for example, if a parent is away on deployment. Some schools will know if a child is from a Service family and some local authorities in Wales do collect data on Service children in their area, but this is not mandatory and practice is patchy.

Further assistance for service families:

The Directorate Children and Young People

DYCP has produced a guide, Families on the Move, which provides advice on how to deal with the transition period of moving and minimise the impact on children as much as possible. It contains a helpful checklist of actions and contact details of the CEAS helpline. This can be obtained by contacting DYCP.

Further information available on this website:
www.gov.uk/government/groups/directorate-children-and-young-people

SSCE Cymru:

The SSCE Cymru project has produced a series of digital stories, allowing Service children to share their own experiences about what it is like to have a parent in the Armed Forces.
www.sscecymru.co.uk/child-stories

Welsh Government 'Welcomes to Wales'

The Welsh Government has produced a package of support for the Armed Forces community that includes background on the education system in Wales

English language version:
http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/communities/safety/armedforces/package-of-support/?lang=en

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES

Military Kids Club (MKC) Heroes

MKC heroes is an international pupil voice initiative formed to support Service and veterans' children and young people. The group started in 2010 as HMS Heroes to enable the children of serving personnel and veterans going through similar challenges to come together and support each other. It allows Service children to explain to others the unique challenges that children face in being part of a military family and provides a safe space to talk with friends who understand what it means to be a Service pupil, providing the support that Service pupils need, when it is most needed. There are currently over 9,000 members of MKC Heroes spread across over 140 schools located all over the world.

Further information: **www.mkcheroes.co.uk**

Llantwit Major school / Brecon High School

Llantwit Major School in the Vale of Glamorgan organise events throughout the year as part of their MKC Heroes work, supporting Service children and bringing them together with non-Service children. The school's 'MoD Ambassadors' also have regular meetings throughout the year to plan and organise commemorations and charity days such as 'Red White and Blue day' and Armed Forces Day. The school also runs an MoD parent forum where parents of current Service pupils are able to come in and hear about events that the school are organising or updates on events that have happened that term.

The school have teamed up with the Motivational Preparation College for Training (MPCT) to provide additional support for Service children. MPCT staff attend the school and work on a number of different challenges with pupils such as team building, leadership and communication. The instructors also provide mentoring to the Service children throughout the year and support these students when they may need it. The school have also built links with **Brecon High School** and collaborate to provide challenge days where pupils from both schools get together to complete challenges and activities, have fun and make friends.

Prendergast primary school

Prendergast primary school in Haverfordwest has around 14% Service children within the school. The school runs an MKC Heroes club after school, supporting Service children and their friends by providing fun activities and opportunities to chat, support each other and have fun. This is run in conjunction with the school's MoD keyworker who is the first point of contact for Service children and their families.

Reading Force

Reading Force is a tri-service shared reading charity which gives books and scrapbooks to Service families. It offers its service to all Armed Forces families in all circumstances, at home or away, and is especially useful when a parent is away from home due to deployment or training as a way of staying close to an absent parent, and to keep in touch with grandparents and extended family living far away. Families can request their free books and special scrapbooks via the Reading Force website, and children of all ages, from birth to 18, are encouraged to take part in this fun activity. Taking part is free for all Regular Forces, Reserves and ex-Services children.

The website provides full information on how to take part: **www.readingforce.org.uk**

Breakdown of ESF funding that has come to schools and projects in Wales

2011 - **£70,183.50**	2015 - **£322,643.00**
2012 - **£91,079.00**	2016 - **£436,945.00**
2013 - **£128,408.00**	2017 - **£406,188.00**
2014 - **£328,071.00**	Total Awarded - **£1,783,517.50**

CHAPTER THREE

FUNDING SUPPORT

Unlike in England and Northern Ireland, there is currently no specific funding provided to support Service children in Wales as a group. As the Legion stated in its 2016 Welsh Assembly election manifesto, schools in Wales are only able to access funds in support of their Service pupils from the MoD's Education Support Fund which is open to all schools in the UK. Whilst schools in Wales have been successful in securing funding and are delivering some excellent work as a result, the Legion maintains that the absence of a Service Pupil Premium (SPP) leaves the children of serving personnel in Wales disadvantaged compared to their peers elsewhere in the UK. The SPP in England provides £300 per Service pupil to help provide additional pastoral support during periods of parental deployment and reduce the disadvantages Service children may face.

As schools in Wales are not required to identify Service children in the schools census, it is also difficult to know how Service children are progressing and what support they may need.

Education Support Fund

The Education Support Fund (ESF) is a MoD fund that assists publicly funded schools in mitigating the effects of mobility or deployment on their Service communities, both Regular and Reserve. Since 2011, the fund has provided over £1.7million to projects in Wales, supporting innovative work to support Service children. The MoD, SSCE Cymru project and local Covenant partners have done much work to promote the fund helping ensure that schools – and Service children – in Wales fully benefit from it.

Since its creation the fund has been time-limited and 2017/18 was intended to be the last year that applications could be made for funding. In July 2018, the Ministry of Defence announced that they would extend the ESF, on a limited basis, for two years. The fund will consist of £3 million 2018/19 and £2 million in 2019/20. Application information can be found at **www.gov.uk/government/publications/mod-support-fund-for-schools-with-service-children-grant-application-pack**

In 2018/19 the Welsh Government provided £200k to support the children of Armed Forces personnel in Wales for the 2018/19 academic year. **www.sscecymru.co.uk/supporting-service-children-in-wales-fund**

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES

Prendergast Primary School

Located in Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, Prendergast is the school of choice for many Service families based at Cawdor barracks, Brawdy.

The school has 71 Service children out of a total school population of 525 and works hard to ensure these pupils are fully integrated with non-Service children. In the absence of a Service Pupil Premium in Wales, the school sought MoD grant funding to employ an MoD keyworker to engage directly with Service children, families and the MoD welfare services, based locally at the barracks. The keyworker supports children to help them settle in and assess whether new children need any further intervention or support.

The school works hard to welcome new Service children to the school and the area, providing a starter pack and assigning pupils with a buddy for the first few days. When a Service pupil leaves the school, they also complete an exit pack to help them during the transfer. This process has been so successful that it has been extended to all new children entering school.

The school also runs after school clubs for Service children and their friends, helping build friendships and support networks. The school offers excellent out of hours provision for all learners with specific provision for Service children also via the Military Kids Club Heroes scheme. This is available for all Service children and their friends across the area.

To help strengthen the school induction and exit processes, staff visited Mary's CofE School in Credenhill, Herefordshire to identify good practice and to use this information to further enhance their support mechanisms. They observed how data was collected, collated and used to ensure the children from a Service background did not suffer in their learning compared to other pupils. They also looked at how using whole-school events could ensure that all members of the school community have a better understanding of the lives that Service families lead.

Rhondda Cynon Taf

Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) County Borough Council recognised that Service children living in the borough may require additional support to overcome the potential barriers to engaging in education due to the military lifestyle. To enable the support to be delivered they first had to gain an accurate understanding as to the number of Service children that were attending schools across the borough.

In 2015, RCT took steps to address this gap in information when they applied for and successfully secured funding from the ESF to recruit two Her Majesty's Forces Education Support Officers. Working with primary and secondary schools and other partners across the area, these officers have helped identify Service children across the whole borough, raising awareness of their needs and building relationships with the wider Military Community, schools and partners from across Wales and further. The project has since supported the identification of 218 Service children spread across 71 schools. To further improve this key priority the service is now asking the following question during the admissions process: *Is the child a member of an Armed Forces family who are already living, returning or waiting to move to the above address/postcode?*

Llantwit Major Comprehensive

Utilising the ESF in 2016/17, the school has provided Service children with options for some additional provision via the school's 'Contract to Success'. The options provided for pupils include music lessons, literacy and numeracy tutoring, Welsh lessons, and team building sessions.

FURTHER ASSISTANCE FOR SERVICE FAMILIES

The Royal British Legion Women's Section President's Award Scheme:

The President's Award Scheme can provide educational grants and scholarships to the children of serving and ex-Service non-commissioned ranks up to university age. Full information on the awards and application process can be found here: **www.rblws.org.uk/how-we-help/president-s-award-scheme**

Ysgol Plascrug School, Aberystwyth

Plascrug is a primary school of 400 pupils based in Aberystwyth, West Wales. Compared to some other parts of Wales, the town has a low number of Serving personnel and families living there but this has not prevented the school from taking positive action to ensure the Service families who do live there have access to the support they require.

In 2016 Head-teacher Menna Sweeney applied to the ESF, following the identification of two Service families in the school. It was felt by the school that more support should be in place for these families who were dealing with unique issues and challenges. Working with the families, the school identified that support with after school care for the children would be beneficial for parents, particularly where one parent was on deployment. New resources for the classroom which Service children and their peers could use, were additionally seen as a priority area. The school also consulted the local Armed Forces champion and the local Covenant partnership to build links and understanding of the issues locally.

Thanks to ESF funding in 2016/17, the school has managed to provide a new after-school club to provide care for the Service children and their fellow pupils, in addition to their usual provision. This 'Multi skills' club allowed the children to stay on after school, providing welcome childcare for the families, whilst learning, playing and having fun in a safe environment. The funding has also been used to provide an iPad so the Service children can share their work with their deployed parent. The children have also been able to video call when they were away which has been of great benefit to the whole family.

Additional resources, such as books and learning tools, have been purchased and the school's nurture unit – again utilised by the Service children and their classmates – has been renovated outside to provide a nice environment for learning outside the classroom.

A families' experience

Stacey Mleczek, from Aberystwyth, is the mother of two young children, Marek and Mollie. Her husband Jack has been in the Royal Navy for 10 years. Her children have experience of the emotional strain that can be suffered as a result of a parent being away on deployment.

"Jack has been in the Navy for over ten years now and I'd say more support is required for children and families back at home, especially in areas where there are not a huge number of other Service families.

We have faced many challenges, one being the decision about where to base ourselves as a family. Should we stay in our home town where we have strong family support networks, a stable home and school for the children but where the children were not seeing Dad so much; or do we move to Portsmouth where we would be around families in the same situation who would know exactly what we are going through, be able to see Jack every night when he wasn't away but have no family around us especially when he goes away on deployment. We decided to stay in Aberystwyth so I would have both families around but I do always feel guilty that the children don't see their Dad.

Marek had awful separation anxiety from me when Jack went away. Getting him to school and to his class was extremely difficult and upsetting as he would scream for me not to leave him. When Jack was away last year for nine months it was very tough. If we missed Jack's call home, we'd have to wait until the next day to hear from him and that was hard for all of us. I did have some issues with Marek's behaviour, just because he was trying to deal with his Dad not being there. I do find it hard dealing with the emotional strain on the children when Jack goes away so any help with dealing with that on a day to day basis would be welcome.

Helping the kids learn how to deal with it and know they aren't the only children with a parent that comes and goes, would be great. Over this last year Marek has completely changed. Now he doesn't get upset at all and is happy to go to school, is really confident and is fine leaving me and joining his friends at the school-gates.

Since the school have known about our situation, the support for Marek has been incredible. His teachers have done so much with him to help him, speaking to him and helping him deal with things. They have got some new resources for Marek and for his class to use. Marek has used the ipad to send his work to his Dad which has been brilliant, keeping us connected. Before Jack goes away and when he gets back they always support us having time together as a family too which is so important.

The school didn't know Marek was a Service child until he had been there for 2 years as it isn't something you really bring up. It was only because I wanted the school to know Jack was going away for 9 months that I raised it as I didn't know how it was going to affect Marek. I am extremely lucky that I know a few of the teachers so I was happy to approach them and explain our situation but I know that may not be as easy for some parents who could be new to the area".

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CHAPTER FOUR

WELSH LANGUAGE

Wales has two official languages – Welsh and English. Official status has a legal effect, and means that the Welsh language should not be treated less favourably than the English language in Wales. Around 20% of the population speak Welsh. All pupils in Wales have to study Welsh up to GCSE.

As one of the two national languages of Wales, Welsh is an everyday part of school life and is a compulsory part of all children's education. At the end of Key Stage 2, 3 and 4, they will be assessed (according to their prior education, knowledge and ability). At Key Stage 4, the curriculum currently requires all pupils to take a short course in Welsh (equivalent to half a GCSE).[1]

If an Armed forces family are moving into Wales for the first time, they may not be aware of how the language is taught in schools. They may also have worries about their child being left behind because the language is completely new to them and the impact on their results and progress in school.

What the Welsh Government say:
"The Welsh Government recognises that learners for whom English or Welsh is an additional language (EAL/WAL) have different challenges in relation to language and literacy acquisition. EAL/WAL learners may be accessing English/Welsh for the first time and will, therefore, require additional focused support to help them acquire appropriate literacy skills. Material should be provided that is appropriate to their ability, previous education and experience, and which extends their language development. The year-by-year nature of the expectation statements allows schools and settings to ensure that they are incorporating the appropriate skills into their curriculum delivery."[2]

If you are worried about your child's attainment or the challenges they may face when starting to learn Welsh for the first time, it is important to speak to the school to see how they can best support your child.
http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/allsectorpolicies/welshmededuca/?lang=en

Schools can help reassure parents, explaining the support they offer pupils learning Welsh for the first time / for whom Welsh is an additional language.

[1] http://www.sscecymru.co.uk/toolkit/parentToolkit.php

[2] http://learning.gov.wales/docs/learningwales/publications/141016-revised-areas-of-learning-and-programmes-of-study.pdf

CHAPTER FIVE

ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS

The SSCE Cymru project has commissioned research in Wales looking at the unique experiences and needs of children of Armed Forces personnel who have Additional Learning Needs (ALN). Funded by the Ministry of Defence, the Welsh Institute of Health and Social Care in partnership with Arad Research is conducting the study which is looking to achieve three key things. The research will:

1. Review and compile data on the number of service children with SEN/ALN in Wales, and compare with the UK data
2. Explore the experiences of families and stakeholders in respect of supporting service children with SEN/ALN
3. Identify the implications of the research in practice, in the context of the Welsh ALN Bill

If you would like to find out more, please contact:

Dr Mark Llewellyn
Tel: 07824 460625 / 01443 483070
mark.llewellyn@southwales.ac.uk

Further assistance for families about ALN (Additional Learning Needs) SEN (Special Educational Needs) can be found here: **http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/additional-learning-special-educational-needs/?lang=en**

CONCLUSION

SUGGESTED ACTIONS TO TAKE

Schools

- Ensure that staff can learn about Service life and the unique challenges that Service children may face, raising awareness of the needs of Service children in general. This can be achieved by building good relationships with local Armed Forces units and having regular conversations with Service families. Encourage parents to engage with the school or encourage them to join the school board as a governor, creating a clear and formal connection between the school and the Armed Forces community.

- Provide additional support to Service children when needed. The support may already be in place via a school's broader work and it may just need to be tailored to the Service child to reflect the issues they may be facing.

- Connect with other schools that have Service children and share ideas, policy and practice to help improve their emotional and social wellbeing.

- Can you find out if you have Service children in your school? Can you ensure this is covered in the admissions stage? Make it standard practice to ask the parents of all new pupils moving to the school if the child is from a Service family. The Legion has called for the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) to be changed so that all schools have to ask this question, regardless of how many Service children are in the area or how prominent the Armed Forces community may be locally.

- Make contact with the SSCE Cymru project and engage with available resources such as the Guides for Schools and Parents.

- Don't assume that just because you don't have a base nearby, you don't have Service children in your school.

- Set up an MKC Heroes club in your school. Contact the organisation through their website and they will send out everything you need to get started.

Both Mount Street schools in Brecon (Infants and Juniors) make a point of ensuring that their board of governors elect one member of the Armed Forces community and one Nepalese governor. Both schools have a significant number of military children and are the schools of choice for many military families.

At RAF Valley on the Isle of Anglesey, the Officer Commanding base Support and Officer Commanding Personnel Services Flight sit on the board of Governors at Ysgol y Tywyn – one of the station's local primary school. This helps build on the strong links between the Serving community and local school. Pupils from the school also regularly visit the station and access the gymnasium for sporting activities, allowing children to experience the facilities on offer and helping integration between the Armed Forces and local population. The station also organises family events throughout the year, helping families meet, engage and have fun. These include the annual Families day event, Station Halloween and children Christmas party events, as well as themed events in a number of locations across the station.

Official opening of the refurbished community buildings at RAF Valley with local school children.

Local authorities

- Train staff on correct admission procedures for in-year admissions of Service pupils and raise awareness of the potential difficulties faced by Service families, among schools in the area. Monitor the experience of Service families going through the process and make improvements where needed.

- Try and plan far in advance for expected moves of Service pupils from other parts of the country or abroad. Good links with the Armed Forces community through a Covenant board or local military liaison will facilitate a good flow of information.

- Help ensure that local military units, schools and the local authority have a strong relationship and means to communicate, so they can raise any issues and exchange information on upcoming moves of either units or families eg. via a local Armed Forces Covenant forum.

- Monitor the experience of Service children in schools as part of education policy and ongoing commitments to the Armed Forces Covenant. Produce action plans to address any problems that arise and review the progress and effectiveness of those actions. You can also ensure activity to support Service children is reflected in local Covenant action plans by engaging with your local Armed Forces Champion or local authority lead/liaison officer.

- Provide information about services for Service families through the local authority website and through schools themselves.

- Encourage collaboration between schools and the Armed Forces community to bring like-minded pupils together. Speak to children and families and find out what support – if any – they require, and develop programmes to help their wellbeing. Consider building a local network of schools with Service pupils.

- Provide support to schools who want to establish an MKC Heroes club. Perhaps they can link with existing clubs or after school support you are running.

Service families

- Help is available to parents with admissions queries from the Children's Education Advisory Service (CEAS). The CEAS provides valuable information on school admissions and runs a telephone and online helpline for parents of Service children with queries.

- Contact the SSCE Cymru project for advice, supporting materials and guidance.

- Support is available from the three service Families Federations. They help many families with queries relating to schools and can help talk through the process and provide advice.

- Speak to your school and tell them your child is from a Service family – as early as you can. If deployment is causing issues for you as a family, the school are well placed to support you and will want to hear from you so they can best meet the needs of their pupils and understand what may be affecting them.

- Speak to your unit, HIVE or welfare service within the MoD for a range of support.

- Look at The Royal British Legion Women's Section President's Award Scheme if your child / young person needs some help with costs to study in school or college or go to university.

Welsh Government

- Ensure Service children are identified within schools via the PLASC system.

- Explore possibility of a Service Pupil Premium for Wales. There are excellent examples in Wales of where the Education Support Fund is making a real difference to the support for Service children in schools. The Legion would again urge the Welsh Government to examine the implementation of a Service Pupil Premium for Wales, particularly if the MoD fund comes to an end leaving Service children in Wales disadvantaged in terms of targeted funding.

USEFUL LINKS

- **Army Families Federation** – have a dedicated education and childcare specialist:
  www.aff.org.uk

- **Children's Education Advisory Service (CEAS):**
  https://www.gov.uk/guidance/childrens-education-advisory-service

- **Welsh Government:**
  Welcome to Wales:
  http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/communities/safety/armedforces/package-of-support/?lang=en

  School Admissions Code:
  http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/admissions-and-appeals-code/?lang=en

- **MKC Heroes:**
  www.mkcheroes.co.uk

- **Naval Families Federation:**
  www.nff.org.uk

- **My local school:**
  Welsh Government website that offers important information on local schools including pupil numbers, attainment, courses studied, school budget per pupil and benchmarking
  http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/

- **Our Community, Our Covenant:**
  Improving the Delivery of local Covenant pledges:
  https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/communities/armed-forces-covenant

- **RAF Families Federation:**
  www.raf-ff.org.uk

- **SSCE Cymru:**
  http://www.sscecymru.co.uk/home/

- **Veterans' Gateway:**
  The Veterans' gateway puts veterans and their families in touch with the organisations best placed to help with the information, advice and support they need – from healthcare and housing to employability, finances, personal relationships and more.
  www.veteransgateway.org.uk/

- **The Royal British Legion Women's Section's President's Award Scheme** can provide educational grants and scholarships to the children of serving and ex-Service non-commissioned ranks up to university age.

  Full information on the awards and application process can be found via the website:
  www.rblws.org.uk/how-we-help/president-s-award-scheme

- **Welsh Local Government Association:**
  For information on local authorities in Wales:
  http://wlga.wales/welsh-local-authority-links

The Royal British Legion would like to thank all those featured in this publication particularly the Service families and schools for their support.

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THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

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