



The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 3: Educating the children of Service personnel

Executive Summary

In 2011 AFF asked families if they were 'prepared to accept the military lifestyle (frequent moves, standard of housing, long periods of separation etc) providing their child(ren)'s education was not adversely affected. 98% of families (1,359) agreed.

Despite heightened awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant, welcome changes to the Admissions Code and Admission Appeals Code, the permission to use unit addresses rather than SFA addresses to secure a place at a school, families continue to feel that mobility impacts significantly on their children.

For mobile families, each time they move they enter a lottery; whether they get a choice of schools (overseas) or whether they get children into a good or failing school. Will their child be studying a different curriculum or redoing or missing bits from the one they are already on? If they move between Scotland and some overseas locations they might have to go up or down a year. Children with SEN issues find mobility often exacerbates their condition or delays diagnosis.

It is no wonder when we asked Service families to feed into this report that the retention of CEA continues to be such an emotive subject - for some parents continued service depends on the retention of CEA - it is the only acceptable compromise.

Our report breaks down into the subheadings given by the Committee:

1. The difficulties facing Service families in achieving the same standard of education for their children as they would if they were civilians in the UK or overseas
2. The provision of education for all Service children from pre-school to age nineteen, including those with special needs
3. The transfer of information about pupils between schools, in particular pupils with SEN
4. The adequacy of oversight and monitoring of Service children's education

We also look at attainment and the effects of redundancy and transition into civilian life.

Our main recommendations:

- That an organisation such as CEAS endorses a SEN 'summary of need' that would detail provision required that LAs have to adhere to
- That the option of CEA is retained for any Service family that remains mobile
- That Service pupil attainment is judged not against the whole population but against families with at least one working parents to give a more like for like analysis
- That CEAS is resourced more effectively

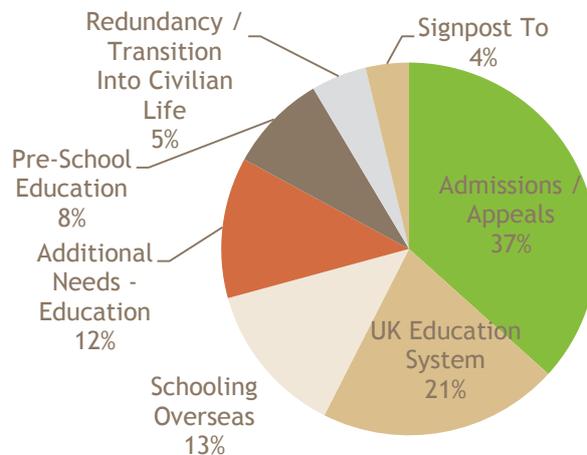


The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 3: Educating the Children of Service personnel

‘My twelve year old has been to five schools. The duplication in curriculum (eg he repeated a term’s history study of the Victorians); the end of friendships after a year, and especially the lack of opportunity to develop relationships and leadership skills in one school has been a real handicap’

In 2011 AFF asked families if they were ‘prepared to accept the military lifestyle (frequent moves, standard of housing, long periods of separation etc) providing their child(ren)’s education was not adversely affected. 98% of families (1,359) agreed¹.

In 2012 AFF dealt with around 400 queries regarding educating children of Service personnel. Our Education & Childcare Specialist works with the Army, Children’s Education Advisory Service (CEAS), Service Children’s Education (SCE) and Local Authorities (LAs) to help resolve some of these queries.



We have broken this report down into the areas that the Committee are particularly interested in.

1. The difficulties facing Service families in achieving the same standard of education for their children as they would if they were civilians in the UK or overseas

AFF’s annual survey on the opinion of Army families² in June asked ‘when moving, which statements regarding the impact of mobility on children do you agree or disagree with? (1,703 families responded to this particular question)

¹ http://www.aff.org.uk/linkedfiles/aff/affceareportfullversion_mar2011.pdf

² http://www.aff.org.uk/linkedfiles/aff/about_aff/aff_research/affgrabpublic2012final.pdf



1.1 Allocation of places

The new School Admissions Code 2012 and School Admissions Appeals Code 2012 have considerably helped military families in getting their children into school outside the normal admissions round. Particularly in infant classes as mentioned in the code. We are waiting to see the impact on families applying to Academies as they have their own admissions criteria but realise government guidelines state that they should be guided by the admissions code.

However, despite LA's agreement to accept unit addresses instead of SFA addresses, families still struggle to get their children in to schools. In areas such as London, Andover and Catterick using a unit address is nugatory as the SFA is geographically dispersed over a twenty mile radius and sometimes more in London.

‘We were given Non Availability Certificate (NAC) therefore only issued address fourteen days before assignment date. We have four children, two studying GCSE’s and two with SEN. Fourteen days was not long enough [to sort our family out]’

1.2 Getting families into the same school

The code has recently changed which means that military families are no more disadvantaged than civilian ones. However, AFF would still argue that military families don’t have access to the same resources as civilian ones who are settled in an area. Military families often do not have the support of family and friends or a network where they can ask for help in getting their children to more than one school in the mornings. Civilian families make a choice to move whereas Service families must move on posting if they occupy SFA.

Case Study

An F&C spouse has an appeal with a primary school regarding one of her children due to start P1 in August. She already has one of her children in the school but they have told her there are no places for the other one. This family already live on a remote patch which is further away from the barracks than the others. The school their child currently attends is a Catholic School which is very important to them; the school they have been offered for the other child is a round trip of around twenty miles in completely opposite directions. The family also have very young children and the husband is deploying to Afghanistan in September when the school term begins - which is causing huge stress for this family. The spouse is quite shy - she is Fijian and she would like support at the appeals meeting as she feels she cannot fully explain the full impact this separation will have on the family unit.

1.3 Transfers within UK and overseas postings

A family moving between England, NI and Scotland face difficulties with not only the curriculum but year entry dates.

‘Due to postings in [UK] Scotland and Northern Ireland we have adversely affected our children’s education as they are in three totally different systems where the entry dates vary. A child born in August in England will go in to a particular school year, but would be in the year below in NI or Scotland. Therefore, our daughter went down a school year, then back up, then down again. She is now in boarding school and is back up a year again’

This issue is not just isolated to the UK. There are examples where SCE is not provided for families and they use the local schools. This could mean that a child that has started school may go back to nursery (Kindergarten or Pre - K in the US) and that they have to jump a year when they come back. There is a lack of information available for a family which currently is largely gleaned from the current occupant of the post.

Transfer of records is not standardised therefore it can be a lottery for families as to how and what meaningful records are passed to the next school.

1.4 Curriculum

'My son studied the Egyptians and Tudors three times during his primary education!'

Aside from a child repeating a topic there are also issues when a child arrives mid-term and has missed out on work already carried out by the class. Despite all coming under Directorate Children & Young People (DCYP). The curriculum even changes when moving between SCE schools!

1.5 Continuity of SEN provision

For those families choosing not to use the CEA system to help deal with their child's SEN, the effect of mobility on an SEN child can be more severe.

'I think what I am trying to say is that life is difficult enough when you have children who find just existing in the world a difficult task. Adding extra stress to the family trying to sort out support for your children, in addition to separated and operational tours is not good for anyone. There has to be some way of Service children having an SEN Passport of some sort that can move from LA to LA and at least give a starting point. The last thing our children need is gaps in their provision. Moving will almost certainly cause some regression in their learning patterns and ability to cope with life and stopping provision altogether or changing it significantly will not help. Usually we as parents have already fought hard to put provision in place, we know that it works for our children and we don't need someone else saying... "We have to re-assess before you can have that provision again"'

'We are moving to Dorset. One of our children has SEN. We have fifteen hours on the current statement but Dorset LA has said that a child needs twenty hours to qualify for support'

'Frequent moves have meant that my son (who is in Year 6) has possibly slipped through the net, as he is currently awaiting diagnosis for Asperger Syndrome. If there had not been so many school moves, we feel this could have been diagnosed sooner. When he has entered a new school, and we have had issues, it has been blamed on the changes or his dad's occupation'

Case study

I have four children. The eldest two (boys) are now seventeen and fifteen respectively, the younger two (girls) are thirteen and eleven. The two boys have both had SEN statements (registered with CEAS) since they were six for autism, ADD and Semantic-Pragmatic speech disorder.

The single biggest disadvantage the boys have faced is the requirement for an LA to create and then maintain their statements as we have moved around. In my view it is absurd that CEAS cannot be given statutory authority to grant and then maintain a statement. Currently we are reliant on Oxon CC maintaining the boys' statements but when we return to UK we will be back to arguing with (in all likelihood) another LA all over again. Add to that the reality that we are due to move in 2014 at exactly the moment when our eldest son is due to finish his current provision - but because we have no LA to 'deal' with (because we do not

know where we are posted) we cannot set about planning the funding etc for 'what happens next?' for him.

If CEAS cannot gain either the statutory authority to grant and maintain a statement or to consider post compulsory education provision/needs then it could be better for us to be 'assigned' a single LA who then oversee our boys all the way through irrespective of where we are posted. If that meant joint funding through an LA or contractual provision to have a military secretariat within an LA, it would be better than CEAS without the power to grant and maintain a statement when overseas and/or when moving about within Britain.

The new SEN Code of Practice sets out plans for a new 'Local Offer'. In practice, this is likely to be problematic for mobile families as offers will differ from LA to LA and also from England to Scotland, for example. AFF is pleased that families will have more say in how their funding is spent on their child, and recognise that the Government understands that it is fundamental that, as a mobile family, parents really do know their child best. Families are quite rightly worried about a lack of continuous seamless support for their SEN child on posting.

AFF VIEW

AFF would like to see an organisation such as CEAS endorsed to offer a SEN 'summary of need' that would detail the provision required and have to be taken up by schools. We would also like to see some reassurance or guarantee that funding will be available for a family moving into a new area and that the LA budget will allow for this without potentially the need for a lengthy appeal.

1.6 Friendship issues

With moving and separation often on the horizon friendships at school often provide the central stability for a Service child. If a change is necessary during a posting due to change of stage of education then it is vitally important for that child to maintain precious friendships already made and to optimise the years spent in one place. It is also worth noting that other Service families offer shared experience which helps children in tough circumstances.

1.7 Other

'On moving we have been told that our daughter cannot be given a place at the local junior school as she has not attended the infant school which is the feeder school'

2 The provision of education for all Service children from pre-school to age nineteen, including those with special needs

2.1 SCE provision

Currently provides education and childcare for families with children up to nineteen who are posted overseas. Predominantly this is in Germany and Cyprus. There are concerns for adequate provision during drawdown in Germany as numbers of pupils get fewer. There is also some concern that one primary school failed an OFSTED inspection last year.

AFF is concerned as families do not have a choice of school as they do in the UK and that a school in special measures is all that is on offer is plainly not good enough. Also as the school is run by a MOD agency, surely there should be more rigorous checks in place before this situation is allowed to happen?

2.2 Lack of vocational courses overseas

In line with the UK, AFF would like to see more vocational courses on offer for children up to the age of nineteen. The Residential Support Scheme (RSS) provides help with the accommodation costs of learners aged sixteen and over, who need to live away from home to study because their course is not available locally. The RSS is managed by the Young People Learning Agency (YPLA) in conjunction with Department for Education (DfE) for sixteen - eighteen year olds and Business Innovation Skills (BIS) for nineteen+ year olds to address unfairness for those young people living with a family member who is a Service person overseas. However, it creates quite a pressure on families to allow a sixteen year old to go back to the UK on their own to undertake these courses.

2.3 Sixth Form provision

Generally SCE students perform well against their civilian peers with a one to two per cent rise above average for attainment. However, in Germany, Sixth form provision and attainment is a problem. 4.5% of students achieve an A* at A Level, which is well below the national average. 32% achieve an A*/A grade - this is five percentage points below the national and 52% achieve A*-B grade - this is nine percentage points below the national.

In the last academic year the total number of students studying for A Levels was 126. The number of students is decreasing. SCE's worst achieving secondary school results came from Windsor, a school which is closing but currently offering one-to-one tuition for some students. It operates on a full complement of staff but this clearly shows that students need peers.

2.4 Investment in state boarding schools

The Duke of York's state boarding school is about to increase its capacity to 700. AFF would like to see more state boarding school places available for children of Service personnel. We are also aware of plans to potentially offer vocational courses for children at the Duke of York's School which we welcome. AFF recognises that some state boarding schools have Service children high on their admissions criteria but this is no guarantee of a place. As one school told me 'we can't find a place when there isn't one'.

3 The transfer of information about pupils between schools, in particular pupils with Special Educational Needs

DCYP has recruited a project manager (David Walker) to look into the need for a standardised form to use for Service children who move schools. This project is supported by the £3m Support Fund. This is for all military children whether they have SEN or not. AFF is contributing evidence to help where possible and welcomes the creation of a form specifically for Army families.

4 The effectiveness of the various financial support schemes for all Service families

4.1 Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA)

CEA address the effect on mobility of children and allows families to access continuity of education.

‘By the age of six, my eldest son was on his third school. He took almost a year to settle in but refused to participate in team activities and got easily frustrated in lessons if he did not pick it up quickly enough. In the meantime I found moving, struggling for an address and then fighting for entries into schools that could meet his needs unbearably stressful. At eight he started at a prep school - again it took him a year to settle in, to accept that he could form relationships without fear of loss and to catch up where frequent moves and differing curriculum had affected his attainment. Two years later he is in the A stream and participates fully in team activities and has a circle of friends. As for me, knowing that his education is secure, I face each new move (three since starting at prep school) with equanimity’

Despite the press painting this allowance as an officer’s allowance, it is not. In our 2011 CEA survey³ 22% of respondents were Senior NCOs or other ranks. An additional factor to consider is that 30% of those in the category ‘officer’ are Late Entry Officers.

AFF VIEW:

As long as any member of the Armed Forces is mobile, AFF will support the retention of CEA. Whilst we recognise that this is an allowance and the parents must expect to pay some form of contribution to the school, there have been significant increases in fees that will discourage some families. AFF will monitor these increases to check that schools remain affordable. Whilst we are pleased with the increase in state boarding schools which are significantly less expensive, we also recognise that to some families, the small numbers of boarders or flexi boarding is just not suitable for those posted overseas or some distance from the school. Adequate provision of weekend activities will help to stave off isolation and loneliness which could make the situation intolerable for the child.

4.2 SENA

SENA is the Special Educational Needs Addition allowance. This can be claimed by Service families if a child, who is already in receipt of CEA, is then found to have Special Educational Needs (SEN). AFF is monitoring the cost of Special Schools’ fees as often these schools are significantly more expensive than mainstream boarding schools. One Special School’s fees are £14,000 so the family had to find £4,240 a term after claiming CEA and SENA (at time of enquiry £9,760 combined). This is unrealistic for a soldier to afford.

Families have also expressed their concerns over continuous assessment to ‘prove’ that their child still has an additional need, despite in some cases this need being a recognised life-long condition such as Down’s Syndrome. In reality

³http://www.aff.org.uk/linkedfiles/aff/affceareportfullversion_mar2011.pdf

this means that families live with the continual pressure of not knowing whether their next funding application will be accepted or not.

AFF VIEW:

This year AFF is investigating whether more children of Service personnel are likely to be Dyslexic. Initial conversations with an educational psychologist suggested that this is an area that more research is needed.

4.3 Additional allowances in JSP 752

Service Children's Visits (SCV) home from boarding school are only for the beginning and end of term (six single flights per child per year). There is no provision for either half-term or exeat. This allowance covers only a third of the costs at the most. Boarding school culture has changed over the last decade, moving towards a more flexible boarding system that has reduced the numbers of pupils that stay in at the weekend. This puts pressure on Service parents to bring their children home more often, which is expensive.

The allowance of one single return flight for children over eighteen in full-time education was withdrawn. This has caused a huge financial concern for families who accepted a posting far away without realising that they would need to fund three return flights a year on average. Children at university often cannot work to maintain rent for accommodation as they are studying full time and most university accommodation is unavailable in the long holidays.

4.4 Service Premium

AFF welcomes the Service Premium but would like to see the expenditure of it used more successfully across England. We would like to see adequate training for teachers and support staff to enable them to offer effective pastoral care.

Case Study 1

It transpires that my son's head teacher was not aware that we were from a Service family and, as a result, could not explain how the Service Premium was being utilised. The school administrator said it was on SIMS⁴ that our son's father was in the Services (but whether or not this enough to trigger the LA to pay the school is anyone's guess). I just spoke to the LA and they had no idea how a school would know when to claim Service Pupil Premium as the question on parent's profession is not asked on any admission forms. We had previously made the school aware of our family background and also on occasions my husband would pick our son up in uniform. However, do you know what the correct admin process is, because a) I'm still not sure whether the school is getting it, and b) if they are, they are clearly not using it for the purpose it was intended.

⁴ SIMS (School Information Management System) is a management information system used by over 22,000 schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to meet the changing needs of schools over the last 24 years.

The system enables schools to manage student and staff information across all areas of school life including registration, finance and payroll, timetabling, progress tracking and assessment, and whole-school communication.

Case Study 2

We live in Wales and the schools do not receive the Service Premium but the children at schools in Wales still face the same issues that they do when they move in England. There are not many postings in Wales but our children have to learn Welsh, the Service Premium could really benefit the children in giving them extra assistance in this new and unusual language. I do understand that schools are funded differently in Wales but in my opinion it shouldn't make a difference, this money should go straight to the school. My husband serves his country (as did I for ten years), we pay taxes too but our children's schools are missing out on this benefit. It shouldn't matter where the child is at school, it should be all children have this premium or none of them.

AFF VIEW:

AFF is launching in 2013 the 'Service Premium Award' to highlight best practice amongst schools claiming this premium. The details are yet to be finalised but we anticipate offering two or three awards to schools of different sizes. AFF is also currently looking at working with the devolved parliaments and MOD agencies to show the need for this funding and highlight the disparity for Service families.

4.5 £3m Support Fund for state schools with Service children

This support fund has been made available to assist publicly funded schools, Academies and Free Schools throughout the UK to mitigate the effects of mobility or deployment of their Service communities; Regular Armed Forces and Reserve Forces. £6m has been allocated in the first two years.

AFF welcomes this fund that recognises that mobility and deployment that brings particular issues to a Service child and will continue to publicise it.

5 The adequacy of oversight and monitoring of Service Children's education

5.1 CEAS

Under-staffed and under-invested and probably under-utilised. Families report huge frustrations in getting hold of staff. There is currently just one telephone number and one email address freely available to cover the whole world and both professionals and families. This helpline is open part-time hours which is inadequate. CEAS currently has two Parent Support Officers who are experts in helping families appeal for school places, amongst other duties. They are a lifeline to mobile Service families and do outstanding work to help them but are restricted in that there are only two of them to cover the whole of the UK and families returning from abroad.

AFF VIEW

AFF would like to see easier access to help families via a more informative website and longer telephone opening hours to cover at least one session out of normal working hours. Should out of office hours be trialled?

5.2 SCE

SCE is currently being restructured and from this year will come under DYCP and they will lose their agency status. A new chief executive is currently being recruited.

AFF is closely monitoring the situation in Gutersloh regarding the primary school that failed its OFSTED inspection. This situation demonstrates the lack of choice parents overseas face when a school fails they have no other option.

6 Other matters for consideration:

6.1 Attainment

AFF welcomes both the SP and the £3m support fund for state schools to help support Service pupils. Whilst we recognise that these funds are not to increase attainment, very little is being done to monitor individual progress. If a Service child is above the national average at the end of Key Stage 1 and then does not progress at the same pace in Key Stage 2 but still scores one per cent above the national average, there does not appear to be an indicator to say that this child is failing. In fact it could be shown that Service children are equal or one -two percentage points above the national average. Because of mobility and the number of schools that Service children attend, they should be carefully monitored and historical data should be taken into account. These historical records are often difficult to obtain by schools and are easily lost. Currently the information on the DfE website regarding attainment does not take into account the children who left the state sector either because they were failing to progress or because of the high number of schools they had attended or both.

The 'Educational Attainment of the Armed Forces Children in England in relation to 2011' suggests that Service children achieve better than the national average. The sample of Service children has been compared with the whole population (some of whom will be unemployed or working only part time). The OFSTED 2011 report⁵ states that Service children all come from families with at least one working parent. It is also likely that a higher proportion of children in the Service family sample come from two-parent homes than the whole population. Clearer evidence would need to compare like with like as it is possible that the analysis of more similar sample groups may demonstrate that Service children are not attaining at a higher level than a comparable group.

6.2 Redundancy / Transition into civilian life

How does the Armed Forces Covenant work for those leaving the Army?

Case Study:

Sgt X was a non-volunteer in the first redundancy tranche and was made redundant with an exit date of September 2012. He unsuccessfully appealed the redundancy decision.

His daughter had started a combination of GCSEs and BTec at the local school. Sgt X had never claimed Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA)

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/28108/ChildreninServiceFamilies.pdf

and had chosen to move his children around with him on postings.

The family knew that they did not wish to settle in the area but realised that the combination of courses that their daughter was undertaking could not be replicated at any other school. This was verified by Children's Advisory Education Service (CEAS). Sgt X decided to apply for retention of his SFA to allow his daughter to finish the courses. His request was for a ten month extension.

DIO rejected the request and Sgt X approached his chain of command and AFF to help. AFF agreed to help because we felt the following:

If Sgt X had been claiming CEA his daughter would have been allowed to complete her course. Despite his mobility, if Sgt X had continued serving and been posted during this period of his daughter's course he would have been entitled to request retention (it may not have been granted but is rarely refused).

AFF therefore felt that Sgt X and his family had been disadvantaged by service, although acknowledging that housing was very tight in the area that Sgt X required retention, which might then disadvantage a Service family coming in. Sgt X informed us he was happy to pay local rent.

Under the conditions of redundancy, the redundancy cell clarified that Sgt X was able to request for retention for 93 days at service rates and then a further 93 days at local rates. He would then require just over three more months to see his daughter through.

After nine months of Sgt X appealing, AFF campaigning and CEAS issuing an impact statement, DIO's decision was overridden by PS4 allowing Sgt X's daughter to complete her state examinations. As soon as they were finished, Sgt X moved his family away from the area on gaining employment somewhere else.

And finally one pupil's positive view:

Forces education allowed me to develop my personality, and to become independent. The mixture of children and the constant changes of location, etc., made me adaptable. The places we lived gave me another kind of education, making me tolerant and understanding. I think, if you're intelligent, the changing of schools doesn't hurt - if you need a bit of "help", it can be a problem

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