

Title: AFF Listening to our Service Children survey
 Date of issue: June 2019
 Audience: Chain of command, MOD
 Issued by: Jilly Carrell, AFF Education & Childcare Specialist

Issue

AFF surveyed Army personnel and their families to ask about their views on the impact of Service life on Army children. The survey focused primarily on the experiences of parents and their perceptions of their children’s experiences. The results of the survey will contribute to the Service Children’s Progression Alliance’s wider programme investigating how to make sure that Service children’s voices are heard and that listening leads to action that helps them succeed. There were 752 eligible responses to the survey¹.

Background

1. Families are considering whether to leave the Army due to the impact of Service life on their child.

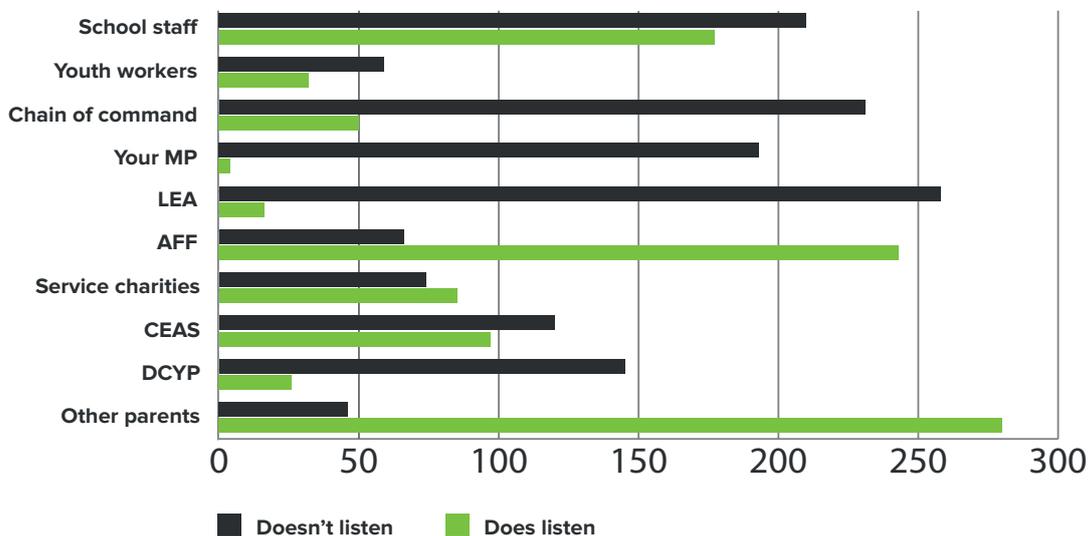
1.1. Families stated that they felt that the chain of command, Local Education Authority and Directorate of Children and Young People were not currently listening to the views and concerns of parents.

1.2



Who do you think listens to your views and concerns about being a Service parent (Please tick all that apply)?

Respondents 462

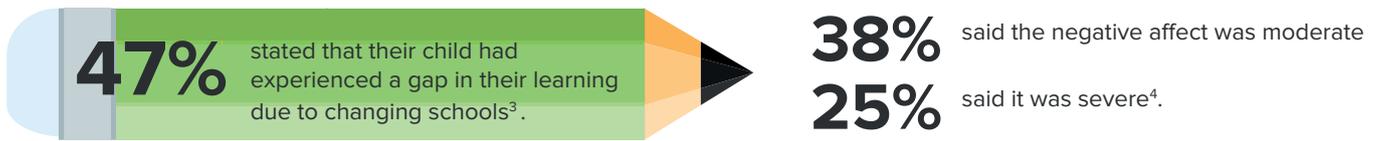


1. 836 people began the survey, with 752 being eligible to continue. Not all respondents answered all questions.

2. 463 respondents.

2. Army children are experiencing gaps in learning with a lack of consistent support.

2.1.



2.2. Comments suggested that there was a lack of consistency in support to deal with gaps in learning, with some schools providing support such as an additional teaching assistant, and others suggesting schools were too busy and overloaded to help a transient child catch up. Families suggested that the Service Pupil Premium should be assisting with these gaps.

2.3. Comments suggested that the impact was not just academic but also had an emotional impact, as the gaps left children feeling 'stupid' or a failure.

"It should also be noted that I think having gaps in knowledge has damaged my son's self-esteem and self-belief. Instead of thinking 'I don't understand this maths, because I've never learnt it' he thinks 'I'm stupid/ I'm terrible at maths' and it has had a long-term negative effect."

"Nothing was done. Posted to an area with oversubscribed schools, meaning we were dumped in a school with a very low expectation of my children when they were high achievers previously, leading them to be bored and isolated."

"Great support in both primary schools for my eldest. Both have good ties with the military community and put lots of interventions in to help the children settle and catch up."

3. Impact on Service life on children can result in significant difficulties with their wellbeing.

3.1. Families' comments cited the impact of Service life and frequent mobility on the mental health and wellbeing of their children; highlighting issues of anxiety and loneliness, low self-esteem and confidence.

3.2. The loss of friendships due to a posting was a key issue with:



3.3. Families regularly mentioned not only the impact of posting on friendships, but also difficulties in attempts to make new friends. Comments highlighted: the difficulties of breaking into established friendship groups; civilian parents discouraging their children from being friends due to the likelihood the Army child will move away; and the difficulty of making friends at the home location for boarding children.



"There are definitely civilian families which prefer their children not to make friends with my children because they will move away. As the children get older and their friendships become more meaningful, it is difficult to move them away from them. It can be heart-breaking. This is why we chose boarding school."

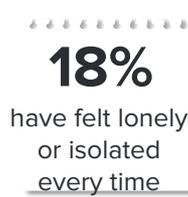
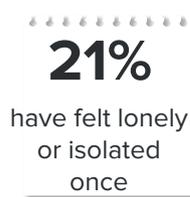
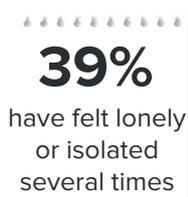
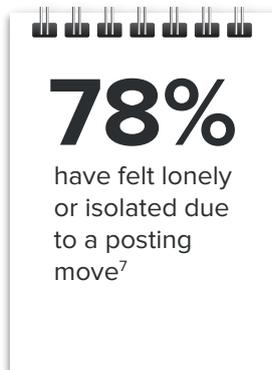
3. 560 respondents.

4. 258 respondents.

5. 642 respondents.

6. 591 respondents.

3.4.



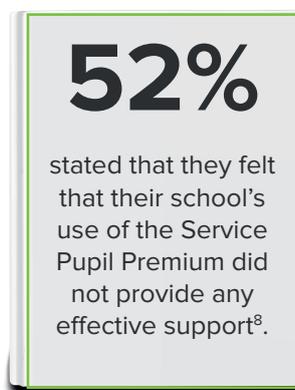
When asked what could have been done to help during this time, families suggested: less frequent postings, with more consideration of the impact of posting moves on their children; more effort at a new school, such as being assigned a buddy, more effort made on their first day and closer monitoring of how the child is fitting in; and more support from the Army to provide activities to allow children to meet and mix.

3.5. Families commented on their concerns about the time it took to gain access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), which could lead to a delay in receiving a diagnosis of special educational needs.

“I don’t see the point of making friends anymore when I know I’m going to leave and they’ll forget me.”

4. Effective use of Service Pupil Premium is inconsistent.

4.1



“At their primary school several years ago, the premium was used for generic services, none of which were useful. Parents tried to get the head to redirect the funds to more useful support but were refused.”

“Our last state school spent the money on whatever they wanted - it was not used specifically for the Service children or used for them at all. In fact, he used it to pay for teachers. The 'guidelines' should be more strict and schools held accountable. Or they pay for something and then claim Service Pupil Premium in arrears after proof is sent and then approved to stop schools misappropriating funds and then letting children down.”

4.2 Comments indicated a lack of consistency in effective use of the funding. Some schools used it well, with benefits for their Service children, but there was a significant amount of concern that the funding was often absorbed into the main school budget with no targeted use for Service children.

4.3. Families wanted more transparency on what the money was used for.

5. Service children have developed unique strengths as a result of Service life.

From the comments sections of the survey, we have identified the following:

5.1. Families stated that Army life offered children the opportunity to make new and diverse friends from different cultures and backgrounds.

5.2. Army life could lead to a building of skills such as resilience, confidence, empathy for others, tolerance and adaptability. Children can develop independence and be tenacious and robust.

5.3. The mobility of Army life offered children a fresh start at a new location and a community of children experiencing the same challenges as them.

5.4. Families commented about a sense of Service children embracing opportunities and displaying a ‘can do’ attitude.

“Resilient, robust, pragmatic - see everything as another adventure, make the most of friendships and opportunities, motivated to do things now, as they might not get the opportunity if they wait.”

“Moving around has made my child more confident meeting new people.”

7. 625 respondents.

8. 384 respondents.

6. Boarding and the provision of CEA provides necessary mitigation to the impact of Service life.

From the comments sections of the survey, we have identified the following:

6.1. There were a significant amount of comments about the importance of the Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA) to provide stability and continuity of education, with families stating they would leave the Army if this was not provided.

6.2. Many families stated that they felt that boarding school had been the only solution to gaps in learning, mitigating the impact of multiple school moves and the impact on the child's wellbeing.

6.3. There was significant concern about the change in eligibility to CEA in sixth form. Families stated that the new rules were unfair, as they remove continuity of education at a crucial education point. Families highlighted that they had fulfilled their commitment to being mobile and prioritising the Service's need. They stated that if they had known that this commitment would not be honoured, they may have made different decisions.

“Our chain of command does not value the sacrifice our children make, whether it's dealing with inadequate schooling, or being separated due to boarding school. So many parents find the boarding school scenario tricky as the goalposts keep changing for transport and there are a ridiculous amount of rules. There are no real education experts monitoring the schools for our children overseas. It comes down to cost and cutting corners. I feel the Army has been cutting back for so long that it is now acceptable to see our children's education as a means of saving money. Shame.....”

“I don't understand how the point of CEA is to enable continuity of education for a mobile family, and yet, come the sixth form, it is possible that you may have to "begin again" in a local school if you happen not to be moving during those two years. This is the opposite of continuity.”

“Boarding has been their only stability and they know they could lose it at any time. This leads to mental health issues - depression, anxiety, self-harm and eating disorders.”

Summary

AFF's analysis of this survey forms part of our contribution to the Service Children's Progression Alliance 'Year of the Service Child Voice' project. The project is a one-year programme of activity consisting of research activities, briefings and other events to capture and disseminate the voice of Service children in education. The project is due to report in April 2020.

AFF's key findings from this survey, which we will contribute to the programme are:

1. Families are considering whether to leave the Army due to the impact of Service life on their child.
2. Army children are experiencing gaps in learning with a lack of consistent support.
3. Impact of Service life on children can result in significant difficulties with their wellbeing.
4. Effective use of Service Pupil Premium is inconsistent.
5. Service children have developed unique strengths as a result of Service life.
6. Boarding and the provision of CEA provides necessary mitigation to the impact of Service life.