



army families federation
the voice of the Army community

Briefing

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Pupil funding for Service children in Wales

AFF believes that funding support should be provided from the Department of Education in Wales for Service children in school to help reduce the impact of Service life on their education and wellbeing.

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Background

At present, there is no specific funding for Service children in schools in Wales. The £6M MOD Education Support Fund (ESF) provided UK wide funding for schools to support Service children and was distributed annually via a bidding process. This fund has now closed and a proposed extension of the fund by the MOD has so far been unsuccessful. This will leave a significant gap in resources for Service children in schools, including in Wales, as Welsh schools received a proportional percentage of the fund.

AFF is concerned that with the demise of the ESF, there may be times when the regular moves that are part of Service life can impact on school life. AFF would like Service children in Wales to receive targeted funding support in school, in the similar way to that of Service children in Northern Ireland and England who are eligible for unique funding.

Funding for Service children in Northern Ireland and the similar Service Pupil Premium that was introduced in 2011 in England, have provided a high standard of support for Service children in school that is detailed, in part, in a new booklet published by the MOD.¹ AFF would like to see this mirrored by the Welsh Government.

Evidence from Army families

In 2016, AFF received 9,556 enquiries, with 885 of these relating to education and childcare, including Special Educational Needs (SEN). This amounts to 9.3% of the total enquiries received by AFF. Within this number, 125 (14%) were relating to specific pupil funding support, including from some families from Wales. This illustrates the level of concern that Army families have regarding extra support for their children.

Pupil funding is also something that is specifically discussed online, including on our Facebook page, and in online forums. A recent Facebook post that generated 15 comments, 20 likes and 34 shares in a few hours further illustrates the level of concern.

Moving across the devolved nations

Mobile Army families often move from one devolved area to another, which may cause confusion, and may cause a break in support for the child's needs. Whilst AFF recognises that each area has its own pupil funding arrangements, consistent directed funding would assist with the transition of Service children from one area to another.

Examples of excellent support

The Supporting Service Children in Education Wales (SSCECymru) Project² is working with schools to better understand the experiences of education providers, and get to grips with the 'on the-ground' challenges of identifying and supporting

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/579866/20161221-DCYP_SPP_booklet_final_V3.pdf

² <http://www.sscecymru.co.uk/schools>

Service Children in Wales. The project is also working closely with the Welsh Government's All Wales Standing Committee for Service Children in Education to support a consistent approach across Wales. Their film³ outlines the challenges that some Service families face and how to support them.

The Welsh Government's 'Supporting and investing in our Armed Forces Community in Wales' documents 'Welcome to Wales' and 'Giving and Receiving'⁴ feature many areas of Service life. Education is included; in general detail in the first, and again in the second, but with little for children under 16 years. AFF believes that Service children under 16 need additional support, specifically for pastoral care and transition support in order to be able to reach their full potential in school. We believe that highlighting the need for more specific recognition, will enable schools to continue to improve on what they provide.

Human impact

The following examples from recent AFF enquiries detail specific concerns regarding being mobile and disparity of support.

"I am an Army spouse and my daughter has just started school in reception. We have just moved to Wales and I notice that SPP is not available here. Is there a reason why SPP doesn't exist outside England and Northern Ireland?"

Another family have a child with a May birthday. They were posted in Scotland so the child started a year later than in Wales. The following year, they moved to NI and the child started in P2 having missed out a year. The family now face another move to Scotland for a year, before moving to England/Wales where the child will be in a different year group yet again. This family highlights the need for help during transition from one school to another to cope with the school changes, curriculum changes, emotional changes and settling with a different age of peer group.

The cost and the benefits

The Welsh Government provides the Age Weighted Pupil Unit for every child in school. There is also an Education Improvement Grant, but this is not specifically for Service pupils. Elsewhere in the UK, schools in NI receive £410.49 for post primary and £408.88 for primary, and Service children in England receive £300 from Reception until the end of Year 11 in addition to central funding.

It is currently unknown exactly how many Service children are in Wales across all 22 local authority areas, so it would be impossible to say the exact cost, but from the other two examples, the benefits outlined on the Gov.UK website⁵ far outweigh the costs. An annual school census tick box for Service children in order to find out where they attend school, is something that AFF agrees with.

³ <http://www.scecywru.co.uk/ssce-films>

⁴ <http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/communities/safety/armedforces/package-of-support/?lang=en>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-service-pupil-premium>

AFF VIEW:

AFF believes in equality of support for all Service children, irrespective of age and location, ensuring a positive and secure future. AFF would like the Department of Education in Wales to consider providing targeted pupil funding for Service children in schools in Wales to help reduce the impact of other MOD funding being withdrawn. AFF believes that this funding will contribute to the successful education and wellbeing of every Service child in Wales in line with the Armed Forces Covenant.