

helping schools support Service children

Thriving Lives toolkit

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Thrivning Lives Toolkit

The Service Children’s Progression Alliance conducted a large-scale UK-wide consultation which told us that professionals supporting Service children want to be better connected: with each other, with evidence and with support. The Thrivning Lives Toolkit responds directly to this need.

Independent research carried out by the International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS) at the University of Derby comprised:

- Literature review
- Survey in which 479 schools participated
- In-depth, multi-case study investigation with Service children, senior leaders, teachers and support staff in schools with at least a ‘good’ Ofsted rating that are known for their Service child support
- The schools were specifically chosen to provide a balance of primary and secondary, proportions of Service children (from very low to high), while serving all three Services between them.

The research identified seven principles for effective practice and a framework to help schools undertake evidence-based reflection and identify improvement priorities. Research does not identify any principle to be of more importance than another. It is important to consider all seven.

Partnership

The SCiP Alliance is a partnership of people supporting Service children’s education and success. Partnership is fundamental to the Alliance’s existence, but it is also a commitment to a way of working. Running through all seven principles for effective practice is the thread of meaningful and open collaboration with all those who have a stake in supporting Service children to thrive.

Asset-based

The SCiP Alliance takes an asset-based approach. It means we start with the strengths and focus on how to build on them. It does not mean avoiding problems or ignoring issues, instead it challenges us to focus on solutions and to never problematise children themselves. Like all children, Service children have huge potential, and their experiences provide wonderful opportunities to thrive.

Evidence-led

The SCiP Alliance starts with the best available evidence. The robust research underpinning the Thrivning Lives Toolkit provides greater confidence that what we do can be effective. We can never know everything we need to know, but, combined with well-informed professional judgement and an unrelenting focus on the child, a sound evidence base helps provide a foundation on which Service children can thrive.

How to assess your practice

Emerging practice	Developing practice	Embedding practice
Schools with emerging practice will be actively reflecting on their activity and may be implementing actions to enhance their support, but to a small extent	Schools with developing practice will be addressing this principle to a good extent, but this may be partial or yet to be enhanced through regular monitoring and evaluation	Schools with embedding practice will fully address this principle with well-established work that is routinely monitored and evaluated and showing evidence of impact

Advice from Other Schools

This toolkit has been developed by the SCiP Alliance in collaboration with a number of Uni Connect partnerships. The initial draft was piloted in a variety of schools in 2020. Evaluation officers in six Uni Connect partnerships, led by Higher Horizons at Keele University, analysed feedback from schools and provided recommendations which have enhanced the content and format.

Schools in the pilot ranged from those with a high proportion of Service children to those with only a few. Pilot schools served families from the Army, RAF and the Royal Navy in many different locations. All participants recommended that other schools educating Service children use this tool to consider their support for their Service children.

The pilot confirmed that the tool is highly practical and will support you in determining not only overall strategy, but specific actions. Schools suggest

that you schedule time for it on a regular basis, using it as the basis of diagnostic and planning activities.

Many schools highlighted its usefulness in developing governance documents and strategies.

Schools suggest that you use the toolkit not only to record your own thoughts, but as a tool for communication and collaboration within the school and in conversations with others, such as local authorities or inspection teams.

Schools identified the Toolkit's potential to provide a mechanism for schools to share practice, to develop shared activity or to collaborate on funding bids.



The 7 principles of effective support

Principle

Vision

1	Our approach is clear	Leaders' understanding and approach ensure resources and policies improve Service children's outcomes.
2	Wellbeing is supported	Tailored pastoral provision supports Service children's mental health and wellbeing.
3	Achievement is maximised	Teaching, assessment and support ensure the continuity of Service children's learning and progression.
4	Transition is effective	Systems and support ensure seamless transitions for Service children arriving at and leaving school.
5	Children are heard	Service children's diverse voices are heard and inform the support they receive.
6	Parents are engaged	Strong home-school partnerships help Service families feel valued as part of the school community.
7	Staff are well-informed	Supportive training and networks ensure all staff understand and support each Service child.

Evidence suggests:

- Clear policies and strong cultural awareness of the life of a Service child at a school's strategic level are key to effective support
- A central aspect of school transparency and support is the targeted deployment of resources, including dedicated funding where available
- Monitoring Service children's outcomes and the impact of spend and activity can improve the effectiveness of support
- There are 6 key questions for schools to consider



What this might look like:

Research identified that practice supporting this principle may include:

- Having a clear strategy for the targeted deployment of dedicated funding
- Publishing a dedicated strategy for supporting Service children, for example through the school website
- Evaluating the impact of a dedicated strategy, changing it when it is deemed not to be presenting good value for money
- Monitoring and reporting on outcomes for Service children
- Governing body minutes evidencing challenge around Service children's academic progress, achievement and wellbeing
- Strategy and leadership is informed by Service children's voices
- Named staff contact

Examples from practice:

Dedicated funding is "used to buy out some of my time so I am free to do mentoring and some of the money is used to liaise with the Service community's counselling organisations."

(Service children lead, secondary school)

"Appointing a Forces Families Liaison Officer has really benefitted our Service children and families, providing a link between school and home." (Senior leader, primary school)

"Time for staff to be involved with local cluster group for Service families; transport costs for Service Children to participate in activities organised by the cluster; half-termly get-togethers with the Service children at our school and the neighbouring junior school." (Senior leader, primary school with 2 pupils on roll)

Emerging practice

Schools with emerging practice will be actively reflecting on their activity and may be implementing actions to enhance their support, but to a small extent

Developing practice

Schools with developing practice will be addressing this principle to a good extent, but this may be partial or yet to be enhanced through regular monitoring and evaluation

Embedding practice

Schools with embedding practice will fully address this principle with well-established work that is routinely monitored and evaluated and showing evidence of impact

REFLECT	EVIDENCE	SELF-ASSESSMENT			ACTION	DATE
Reflect with stakeholders on these key questions	Identify current practice that demonstrates where you are now	Assess your current practice			Identify actions to enhance your support	Agree a deadline for your actions
		Emerging	Developing	Embedding		
1.1 - To what extent are all those involved in leadership, governance and Service child support aware of funding and other resources available to support Service children?						
1.2 - To what extent do you monitor how dedicated funding is spent?						
1.3 - To what extent is support informed by evidence and monitored for effectiveness?						
1.4 - To what extent do Service family voices and Armed Forces representation inform those responsible for leadership, governance and Service child support?						
1.5 - To what extent do those responsible for school governance ensure Service children's outcomes are monitored and appropriate support is delivered?						
1.6 - To what extent do your admissions policies take account of Service families' frequent, mid-term and short notice moves?						

Evidence suggests:

- Provision of pastoral support for Service children is a priority
- A school environment attuned to the experiences of Service children can promote positive development
- Service children may need extra support during periods of transition and discontinuity
- There are 5 key questions for schools to consider

**What this might look like:****Research identified that practice supporting this principle may include:**

- Opportunities for Service children to explore their experiences and feelings with other Service children in clubs such as those facilitated by the MKC Heroes network
- Engagement with parents to be aware of upcoming deployments
- Supporting a child to research and map a deployed or weekend parent's location
- Exploiting any opportunities in the curriculum to support children and their peers to understand where a deployed parent is stationed
- Embedding understanding of Armed Forces in the curriculum
- Ensuring all staff understand the range of Service children's potential experiences and emotions during the different stages of deployment and separation
- Organising resources for families to maintain connections during periods of separation

Examples from practice:

"We part fund a Family Liaison Officer, part of whose role is to support families in the home during deployment or at times of any stress."

(Senior leader, primary school)

"Our ELSA ... provides an after school 'Forces Fun Club'. They also meet weekly with any child who has a parent away on deployment and supports with letter writing."

(Senior leader, primary school)

"Every child whose parent goes away gets a 'knitted doll' of their parent and the parent has a small knitted 'child'."

(Senior leader, primary school)

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Reflect with stakeholders on these key questions	Identify current practice that demonstrates where you are now	Assess your current practice			Identify actions to enhance your support	Agree a deadline for your actions
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2.1 - To what extent do you create opportunities for Service children to meet, and explore experiences together?						
2.2 - To what extent is your pastoral support informed by Service children's voices?						
2.3 - To what extent do you have mechanisms to provide tailored support when Service children need it while ensuring that they are not singled out unnecessarily?						
2.4 - To what extent does pastoral support take account of points of stress including deployment/weekending, school moves and caring responsibilities?						
2.5 - To what extent do you nurture Service children's identities, and help them feel understood?						

Evidence suggests:

- A commitment to support Service children to maximise personal levels of achievement is a priority
- Transition impacts on attainment in a range of ways, including the disruption of moving, non-alignment of subjects and exam boards, missing curriculum and repeated curriculum
- The emotional impact and stress that deployment and separation have on Service children can affect academic attainment
- There are 6 key questions for schools to consider

**What this might look like:****Research identified that practice supporting this principle may include:**

- Assessment of new arrivals, taking into account the need for a sense of security before undertaking assessments
- Ongoing assessment and monitoring
- Ensuring that a strong focus is placed on ensuring that a Service child's emotional health and wellbeing is supported as a precursor to academic achievement
- One-to-one support or catch-up sessions
- Ensuring Service children are offered additional careers support and exposure to alternative trajectories
- Support for developing and showcasing strengths
- Understanding the national picture on Service children's achievement and what it means for your approach
- Catch-up support to address curriculum gaps
- Support to access extra curricular opportunities

Examples from practice:

“Head of inclusion allows a setting period of less than a month before meeting with parents and pupils and taking information from staff to discuss any gaps. Catch up in the form of alternative homework.”

(Senior leader, middle school)

“We employ extra staff to help fill these gaps with 1:1 or small group catch-up sessions.”

(Senior leader, primary school)

“We’ll try and celebrate a topic that a new student has covered that we don’t do, so we’ll ask them to talk to the class about that theme.”

(Teacher, primary school)

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3

Achievement is maximised

Teaching, assessment and support ensure the continuity of Service children's learning and progression.

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Reflect with stakeholders on these key questions	Identify current practice that demonstrates where you are now	Assess your current practice			Identify actions to enhance your support	Agree a deadline for your actions
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<p>3.1 - To what extent do you assess on entry and monitor Service children's achievement, learning gaps and preferences, support needs and interests and skills?</p>						
<p>3.2 - To what extent do you address gaps and mitigate curriculum and qualification discontinuity?</p>						
<p>3.3 - To what extent do you track and regularly review Service children's outcomes and progress, and tailor support in response?</p>						
<p>3.4 - To what extent do you address Service children's additional learning support needs?</p>						
<p>3.5 - To what extent do you celebrate prior learning and help Service children make the most of their strengths?</p>						
<p>3.6 - To what extent do you provide tailored careers and decision-making support for Service children?</p>						

Evidence suggests:

- A robust and supportive transition procedure for pupils both entering and leaving schools is a priority
- Not only may Service children relocate more than non-Service children, but many move in the middle of the school year
- Service children require bespoke pastoral support for repeated transition
- Proactive and planned support can be particularly important for children with specific educational needs
- There are 6 key questions for schools to consider

**What this might look like:****Research identified that practice supporting this principle may include:**

- Identifying Service children on entry through admission forms
- Identifying current Service children through requests to parents for updated information
- A standing staff meeting item about Service children and any those joining or leaving the school
- Liaising with Service children's previous or next school
- Processes to ensure the first day goes particularly smoothly and a Service child feels welcomed, such as a buddy system (for both children and parents) and clear information for both child and parents
- Schools in England and Wales complete specific fields in the Common Transfer File (CTF)
- A clear, regularly reviewed mobility policy
- Leaving and arriving rituals, such as songs in assembly or special booklets of memories to keep
- Arrivals and leavers display boards with photographs and affirming messages

Examples from practice:

"Our ELSA will visit pupils in the current setting where possible and have conversations with the current school to get an understanding of the child."

(Senior leader, primary school)

"When we don't get paperwork, we phone up the previous school ... If there's an issue with a child, we phone their next school."

(Senior leader, primary school)

"The buddy system helps. It makes you have an automatic friend."

(Service child, secondary school)

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Reflect with stakeholders on these key questions	Identify current practice that demonstrates where you are now	Assess your current practice			Identify actions to enhance your support	Agree a deadline for your actions
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4.1 - To what extent does your school identify Service children?						
4.2 - To what extent do you work with outgoing and incoming families through the long transition process?						
4.3 - To what extent do you welcome families, both before and after their moves, and ensure a positive experience from the first day?						
4.4 - To what extent do you work with a Service children's previous or future schools to transfer records and find out about learning, wellbeing, achievements, interests, skills and their family context?						
4.5 - To what extent do you minimise discontinuity in additional support, for example by minimising re-assessment of needs?						
4.6 - To what extent do you help Service children build new and maintain existing relationships?						

Evidence suggests:

- *It is vital that Service children are heard and that support is consistently improved in the light of the learning*
- *Service children benefit from being actively involved in developing support*
- *Failure to listen can result in a sense of isolation*
- *There are 5 key questions for schools to consider*

**What this might look like:****Research identified that practice supporting this principle may include:**

- Specific arrangements for Service child representation on school council or in ambassador or young governor schemes
- Service child involvement with local Armed Forces community forums and groups
- Facilitating sharing of Service child experiences through arts such as drama, picture books and poster displays
- Mechanisms for the school to capture views from members of Service child support groups
- Enabling participation in conferences and forums for Service children run by LAs, Armed Forces charities and universities
- Using surveys to gather feedback from families about induction procedures, concerns and school processes
- Ensuring Service children feel heard by documenting and celebrating how their views inform change

Examples from practice:

“There are two [school ambassadors] in each class and one of those is always a Service child.”

(Teacher, primary school)

“We created arts sessions based on a day in the life of a Service child, role models and place. We then developed focus groups based on the subjects that had come out of these areas of discussion.”

(Stories Outside The Wire primary project lead)

“We celebrate and recognise the immense feelings of pride that children feel about their parents.”

(SENCO, junior school)

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5.1 - To what extent are Service children represented in school and other forums?						
5.2 - To what extent do Service children's voices inform your strategies, approach and actions throughout the school?						
5.3 - To what extent do Service children feel heard and understood?						
5.4 - To what extent do you act on feedback and ideas from Service children?						
5.5 - To what extent do you monitor and communicate your actions in response to listening to Service children?						

Evidence suggests:

- A commitment to work effectively with Service families is a priority
- Close relationships with parents enable a school to understand the family situation and upcoming deployment, separation or moves
- Empathy, communication and collaboration with families are required in order to foster confidence in school provision
- There are 5 key questions for schools to consider

**What this might look like:**

Research identified that practice supporting this principle may include:

- Workshops for parents
- Support groups for Service families
- Identification and support for parents' emotional health and wellbeing
- Virtual communication with the 'away-from-home' parent
- Employment of an Armed Forces family liaison officer
- Identifying and supporting young carers in Armed Forces families
- Supporting families with consistent behavioural strategies
- Signposting families to other sources of support
- Awareness of family circumstances
- A clear positive welcome to new Armed Forces families

Examples from practice:

“Close liaison with parents means we know when separation/ deployment is likely and can support, if required.”

(Teacher, primary school)

“We have done a lot of work with families when dad comes home; we have sit down meetings with the parents to think about how it will work when one person re-enters the family home.”

(Teacher, primary school)

“Parent liaison support is offered including coffee mornings.”

(Senior leader, SEN school)

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<p>6.1 - To what extent do you provide support to Armed Forces families?</p>						
<p>6.2 - To what extent do you help Armed Forces families build strong relationships with each other and with the school community?</p>						
<p>6.3 - To what extent do you liaise with parents and if appropriate local Armed Forces personnel about deployment and mobility?</p>						
<p>6.4 - To what extent are deployments, separation or impending moves shared with all staff appropriately?</p>						
<p>6.5 - To what extent do you support Service children to communicate with a parent when they are away?</p>						

Evidence suggests:

- Whole school understanding of the context for Service children is a priority
- Supportive and well-informed teachers can be protective factors in situations such as deployment
- Service children's experiences can be diverse
- There are 5 key questions for schools to consider

**What this might look like:****Research identified that practice supporting this principle may include:**

- Designated senior member of staff responsible for ensuring regular training and dissemination of information for example on upcoming moves and deployments
- Training run by specialist pastoral support staff or by outside experts
- Supporting staff attendance at local or national conferences
- Membership of local networks and attendance at meetings and events to keep up to date
- Drawing on the knowledge of teaching and support staff from an Armed Forces background
- Arranging training on an issue of relevance to all children but of particular concern for Service children such as separation
- Provision of simple evidence based introductory resources for all staff to be able to understand and to open up conversation with Service children
- Working with other schools to create networks and share ideas
- Reaching out to nearby university outreach teams

Examples from practice:

"A member of the SLT is responsible for ensuring staff are aware of the needs of Service children across the school. The head teacher and the member of the SLT as a whole read the latest research and ensure information is disseminated."

(Teacher, primary school)

"Pastoral support worker is an RAF wife and grew up as a child of RAF officer."

(Senior leader, primary school)

"We have a number of TAs who have experience with the Forces. These people understand both military and teaching."

(Teacher, primary school)

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Embedding practice

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Reflect with stakeholders on these key questions	Identify current practice that demonstrates where you are now	Assess your current practice			Identify actions to enhance your support	Agree a deadline for your actions
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7.1 - To what extent do you have a named point of contact to help staff support Service children and families?						
7.2 - To what extent do you provide appropriate time for professional development around Service children?						
7.3 - To what extent do you ensure that all staff and governing body members access high quality training about supporting Service children?						
7.4 - To what extent do staff apply research and evidence-based resources in their support for Service children and families?						
7.5 - To what extent do staff engage in local and national networks focused on supporting Service children and families?						