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Mr M White
Headteacher
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Dear Mr White

Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: the quality and impact of partnership provision in schools for children in service families

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 16 and 17 September 2010 to look at the school's contribution to the quality of provision and partnerships for children who are in families of service personnel.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of partnerships, including the quality of the partnerships between schools and agencies and between schools and parents, I looked at how effective the partnerships are in improving children's personal well-being and learning. I also considered the nature of the support given to these children, including those in the most vulnerable circumstances, or those who have a particular special educational need and/or disability, and the arrangements to ensure the continuity of provision when children move in and out of your school.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: meetings with school staff, pupils and parents; discussions with you and the governors; a review of the school's documentation, including the school's self-evaluation form and tracking data; a meeting with the Army Welfare Service; a meeting with the local authority Integrated Services Manager; and a telephone discussion with the local authority's general adviser who leads the local authority's strategy on mitigating the effects of mobility.

The school's contribution to the quality of provision and partnerships for children who are in families of service personnel is outstanding.

Key features

- You and the entire school staff team are fully committed to the inclusion of service families, who are seen as an asset to the school. The very warm welcome that they receive establishes strong relationships with parents and ensures that new pupils settle quickly. Parents report that all staff are extremely friendly and approachable and they are confident that the school can meet their children's needs.
- The movement of pupils in and out of the school is managed extremely well. The school follows up any records for pupils who arrive with little or no information from their previous schools to plan more effectively for pupils' individual learning needs. Although it is common practice for the new class teacher to telephone the previous one to ensure that all information is understood and that any issues are identified and addressed, the school recognises that this becomes more problematic as the number of service pupils increases. This practice is, however, particularly effective for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils who may be vulnerable are safeguarded effectively by the procedures in place and by the school's commitment to meet all pupils' needs.
- Service pupils settle extremely well in the school. Good arrangements are in place for them to initially have a school 'buddy' to help them understand the routines of the school day and find their way around. Pupils say that someone is always on hand to talk to and that teachers check to ensure that all is well.
- Curriculum planning takes full account of pupils' prior knowledge and attainment. Individual target-setting personalises their learning and topic work is skilfully adapted to ensure pupils do not repeat work unnecessarily. Pupils say their learning is sufficiently challenging but great fun and report that they know what is expected of them.
- The Special Educational Needs Coordinator effectively deals with pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, involving the local authority in assessing needs and identifying appropriate support. Clear records are maintained and systems are in place to keep parents informed of their children's progress and help them contribute to the pupils' ongoing assessment.
- Parents of service pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities feel that the school is extremely good at delivering the additional support needed. However, the procedures and practicalities relating to the transfer of statements are confusing and stressful for parents. Continued support is not guaranteed as local authority threshold levels vary and parents say that, were it not for the unfailing support and reassurance offered by the school, they may not have got through the process. Additionally, the need for reassessment within weeks of arrival puts additional pressures on the families and the school. Anxieties increase in case entitlement is to be reduced.

- Outcomes for service pupils are evaluated thoroughly and systematically by the school and indicate that they are responding extremely well to the interventions and support that are in place. As a result, progress for service pupils is as good as, and sometimes better than, non-service pupils and attainment is improving.
- The school's partnership with parents is extremely strong. Parents report that the open door policy enables them to confidently approach any staff member to raise concerns or share information about their child. Support has been described by some as 'exceptional' and comments such as 'they can't do enough for you' and 'I know I can talk to the headteacher or class teacher at any time and I will be listened to and not treated as an inconvenience' are commonplace. In particular, parents are very appreciative of the school's understanding and willingness to consider absence requests to enable pupils to meet and re-engage with a parent returning from overseas deployment. This supports pupils' well-being and learning extremely well.
- The school responds exceptionally well to pupils' and parents' anxieties during overseas deployment of family members. Initiatives, such as the 'worry box' and 'e-worry box', ensure that pupils can raise concerns confidentially with a staff member who will offer advice and support as necessary. The well-attended weekly 'e-Bluey club' supports pupils in writing to their absent family member and enables them to meet together and talk about their experiences. Pupils and serving family members express their heartfelt gratitude for this crucial contact.
- While all parents express their appreciation of the school, some feel they have little assistance and can be disadvantaged when initially trying to secure a school place in a new area. Examples include: needing a confirmed address before they can apply; finding choice limited, particularly when moving during the school year or when they have more than one child, one of whom has special educational needs and/or disabilities; and not always being able to visit a school beforehand. All parents said that they had to be proactive in researching schools in the area initially but found that once they had made contact with the school, it was very supportive and helpful in making the transition as easy as possible.
- The school has identified many barriers to the well-being and learning of pupils from service families. To address these, excellent links have been established with other local schools, the local authority, Army Welfare Services, local children's centres and other agencies, to share best practice and learn from one another. The school is very flexible and responsive to change and is eager to adapt in order to prepare for and meet pupils' needs. Consequently, a suite of new policies and procedures is in place, including the bereavement policy, which is supported by a trained member of staff.
- The school is supported very effectively by the local authority's range of guidance documentation and training opportunities. Guidance booklets offer advice on issues such as the emotional welfare of pupils who regularly have a parent deployed on active service; how to understand and

manage changes in behaviour; developing partnerships with military units; and counselling and support services available before, during and after active service deployment.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop the work with children and their parents who are members of service families.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Lorraine Rowson-Clark
Her Majesty's Inspector