

SESSION PLANS

Supporting the **Camouflaged in the education system** report

Each session begins with a **warm-up or icebreaker** (e.g., “three words to describe school”).

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Exploring school culture

1. School Culture Iceberg

- **Goal:** Explore the visible and hidden parts of school culture.
- **Materials:** Big paper with an iceberg drawn (above/below waterline), sticky notes, pens.
- **Steps:**
 1. Ask: “*What can you see or hear when you go into a school?*” (uniforms, rules, assemblies, playground games) — add these above the waterline.
 2. Then ask: “*What’s underneath — the things you can feel but can’t always see?*” (attitudes to newcomers, how teachers treat pupils, expectations about homework) — add these below the waterline.
 3. Discuss which parts make it easy or hard for forces children to settle in.
- **Adapt for younger kids:** Use pictures instead of words.

2. Belonging Thermometer

- **Goal:** Measure and discuss how school culture affects belonging.
- **Materials:** Big poster of a thermometer or ladder.
- **Steps:**
 1. Ask: “*How much do you feel you belong at school?*” and invite young people to place a sticker along the thermometer.
 2. In small groups, discuss what pushes the ‘temperature’ up or down.
- **Debrief:** Record key factors — e.g., friends, teacher attitudes to moving mid-term, understanding of Forces life.

3. What’s in the Backpack?

- **Goal:** Identify strengths and challenges forces children carry into a new school.
- **Materials:** Paper outlines of a backpack or [make an origami backpack together](#) with clipchart paper as part of the activity.
- **Steps:**
 1. On the outside, write or draw things others notice (accent, uniform, confidence, being “new”).
 2. Inside, write or draw hidden things (worries about a parent deployed, moving often, pride in Forces identity, resilience).
 3. Share and discuss what schools can do to lighten the load.
- **Debrief:** Highlights the unseen impacts of school culture on forces children.

4. School Snapshot Cards

- **Goal:** Identify what matters most about school experiences.
- **Materials:** Pre-prepared cards for [primary schools](#) or [secondary schools](#), or pictures showing aspects of school (e.g., teachers, homework, friends, moving schools, tests, clubs, being new, uniform, sports day, being asked about your Forces parent).
- **Steps:**
 1. Spread cards on a table or floor.

2. Ask: “Pick three that matter most to you about your school life” and “Pick one that feels hardest.”
 3. Invite them to explain why.
- **Adaptation:** Use emojis or photos for younger children.
 - **Follow-up discussion:** Which things would they like schools to keep the same, change, or understand better?

Exploring learning, skills and recognition

1. Assessment Barometer

- **Goal:** Understand feelings about tests, exams, and grading.
- **Materials:** A big wall chart or floor line from “Love them” to “Hate them.”
- **Steps:**
 1. Ask pupils to place a sticker or stand where they feel about assessment.
 2. In pairs, share why they stood there.
 3. Gather key reasons on a flipchart: e.g., pressure, fairness, being compared to others, moving schools, language, pride in doing well.
- **Optional prompt:** “What would make assessment fairer or more useful?”

2. Pyramid of Skills

- **Goal:** Highlight skills and strengths that go beyond academic attainment.
- **Materials:** Pyramid template on paper or wall, sticky notes.
- **Steps:**
 1. Ask: “Write down one skill or strength you have that school recognises,” put near the top.
 2. Then: “Write down skills you’re proud of that school often doesn’t see,” place further down.
 3. Discuss which parts of the pyramid feel most ‘hidden’ and how schools could notice these more.

- **Examples to draw out:** resilience, adapting to new places, teamwork in sport, empathy, languages, leadership in cadets, creative or practical talents.

3. The ‘Beyond the Classroom’ Gallery

- **Goal:** Show ways they demonstrate skills outside traditional schoolwork.
- **Materials:** Paper, markers, collage materials, or an online padlet/jamboard.
- **Steps:**
 1. Invite them to create a gallery picture or card that represents something they’re proud of that isn’t measured by tests – e.g., moving to new schools, helping at home during deployments, sports achievements, languages, volunteering, online skills.
 2. Display them as a gallery and let each participant explain their choice.
- **Debrief:** How could schools better recognise these strengths?

4. Hopes and Worries Hot Air Balloon

- **Goal:** Balance strengths and concerns about school.
- **Materials:** Large hot air balloon poster
- **Steps:**
 1. Basket = what they like and want to keep
 2. Flame = what helps them do well (take off)
 3. Ropes = what stops them from doing well (taking off)
 4. Storm clouds = what makes school or assessment harder (maybe the things they think are harder to control just like the weather)
- **Debrief:** Identify what supports their learning and wider achievement and what they want to change.
- **Close with a reflective or positive round (e.g., one strength they discovered about themselves).**

Exploring personalisation of support

1. What usually happens

- **Goal:** Understand what support children and young people are usually offered in relation to a selection of scenarios and if there is something else they need or want.
- **Materials:** [Printed scenario cards](#), including blanks for them to come up with their own scenarios.
- **Steps:**
 1. Split into small groups with selection of scenarios and blank cards.
 2. Ask what usually happens?
 3. What would help better? (if what they have said usually happens is not supportive)