

Camouflaged in the education system: Executive Summary

Children and young people from Armed Forces families are not always receiving the support they need within Scotland's education system.

While many teachers and schools are aware of the needs of Forces pupils, this report demonstrates that there are gaps in system design and consistency.

Children and young people have told us they need understanding, consistency and support that follows them, rather than support that resets every time they move.

Key Findings

Children and young people described recurring and cumulative challenges related to Forces life:

- Repeated disruptions to learning due to mobility
- Anxiety and concentration challenges linked to deployment and separation
- Gaps in curriculum when moving between systems
- Inconsistent additional support for learning
- Support that depends on individual staff rather than embedded systems
- Feeling different, misunderstood or stereotyped
- Reluctance to seek help after previous requests went unheard

Systemic issues

The report identifies several weaknesses within the systems that children encounter:

- Poor transfer of information between schools and local authorities
- Reassessment rather than continuity of support
- High-stakes assessment models that disadvantage mobile learners
- Limited understanding of Forces life in some schools
- Inconsistent mental health support, especially at times of deployment
- Lack of joined-up coordination between education, welfare and MOD systems

What needs to change

The report calls for a move from **fragmented, reactive responses** towards **coordinated, rights-based systems that follow the child**.

Support needs to be proactively planned around predictable transitions, embedded in school culture and accountable across agencies.

Recommendations

Guarantee proactive support during times of transition, separation and loss

- Coordinate support across systems during:
 - School moves
 - Parental separation, such as deployment and weekending
 - Endings and transitions
- Design support that addresses both learning and wellbeing needs

Embed a whole-school, rights-based approach

Schools should:

- Raise awareness and understanding of Forces life
- Build and maintain cultures of dignity and belonging
- Address prejudice and discrimination
- Ensure children's participation influences decision-making

Children's participation must be recorded, reviewed and demonstrably impactful.

Reform teaching, learning and assessment

- Reduce reliance on single high-stakes assessments
- Improve recognition of prior learning
- Identify and address curriculum gaps systematically
- Allow flexibility during deployment and transitions

Improve data, accountability and coordination

- Better information-sharing across moves
- Clear responsibility across education, welfare and Armed Forces systems
- Ringfenced and sustained support mechanisms
- Long-term monitoring of outcomes

Conclusion

Forces children are adaptable and capable, but adaptation shouldn't be mistaken for a lack of need. Despite the good practice that exists, they face many challenges in school, including disadvantage that arises from mobility and parental separation. Systems need to change and offer support that moves with the child.

Involving Forces children in decision-making is also key to creating lasting, meaningful improvements.