



House of Commons
Defence Committee

Educating Service Children

Eleventh Report of Session 2005–06



House of Commons
Defence Committee

Educating Service Children

Eleventh Report of Session 2005–06

Report, together with formal minutes, oral and written evidence

*Ordered by The House of Commons
to be printed 11 July 2006*

The Defence Committee

The Defence Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Ministry of Defence and its associated public bodies.

Current membership

Rt Hon James Arbuthnot MP (*Conservative, North East Hampshire*) (Chairman)
Mr David S Borrow MP (*Labour, South Ribble*)
Mr David Crausby MP (*Labour, Bolton North East*)
Linda Gilroy MP (*Labour, Plymouth Sutton*)
Mr David Hamilton MP (*Labour, Midlothian*)
Mr Mike Hancock MP (*Liberal Democrat, Portsmouth South*)
Mr Dai Havard MP (*Labour, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney*)
Mr Adam Holloway MP (*Conservative, Gravesham*)
Mr Brian Jenkins MP (*Labour, Tamworth*)
Mr Kevan Jones MP (*Labour, Durham North*)
Robert Key MP (*Conservative, Salisbury*)
Mr Mark Lancaster MP (*Conservative, North East Milton Keynes*)
Willie Rennie MP (*Liberal Democrat, Dunfermline and West Fife*)
John Smith MP (*Labour, Vale of Glamorgan*)

The following Members were also Members of the Committee during the Parliament.

Mr Colin Breed MP (*Liberal Democrat, South East Cornwall*)
Derek Conway MP (*Conservative, Old Bexley and Sidcup*)
Mr Desmond Swayne MP (*Conservative, New Forest West*)

Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental Select Committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at www.parliament.uk/defcom.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Philippa Helme (Clerk), Richard Cooke (Second Clerk), Ian Rogers (Audit Adviser), Stephen Jones (Committee Specialist), Adrian Jenner (Inquiry Manager), Sue Monaghan (Committee Assistant), Sheryl Dinsdale (Secretary) and Stewart McIlvenna (Senior Office Clerk).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Defence Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 5745; the Committee's email address is defcom@parliament.uk. Media inquiries should be addressed to Jessica Bridges-Palmer on 020 7219 0724.

Contents

Report	<i>Page</i>
Summary	3
1 Introduction	5
Our inquiry	5
Web forum	6
2 The issues facing Service children	7
Context	7
Mobility of Service children	7
Emotional impact of mobility	8
Impact on educational attainment	8
Deployments	10
Special educational needs	11
Support for Service parents	14
3 Service Children's Education	16
The role of SCE	16
SCE schools	16
SCE relationship with the DfES	17
Performance of SCE schools	18
Governance arrangements	19
Funding	20
Applying DfES initiatives to SCE schools	21
Children of MoD contractors	22
4 Educating Service children in UK maintained schools	24
Defining Service children	24
Identification of Service children	25
Funding for schools experiencing high mobility	26
Notice of postings and School Admissions Policy	27
Communication between the MoD and schools	29
Transfer of student records between LEAs	30
Pre-school provision	31
Experience of teaching Service children	31
5 Boarding schools	32
Continuity of Education Allowance	32
Queen Victoria School and Duke of York's Royal Military School	34
6 Conclusion	36
Conclusions and recommendations	37
Annex A: List of Abbreviations	41

Annex B: Report on the Committee’s web forum	42
Formal minutes	60
List of written evidence	62
List of unprinted written evidence	63
Defence Committee Reports in this Parliament	64

Summary

Frequent moves are a feature of Service life, and the children of Service personnel can suffer as a result. Mobility can have a detrimental impact on children's emotional well-being and their educational attainment. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) should work with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), local education authorities and individual schools so that the worst effects of mobility are mitigated.

Some Service parents choose to educate their children at boarding school so that they avoid the negative effects of turbulence. The MoD provides an allowance to cover much of this expense: the MoD should undertake research to determine why lower-paid ranks are less likely to educate their children at boarding school.

Children can suffer when their parents are deployed on operations. Regular communication can help. The MoD should increase the provision of telephones and Internet access for Service personnel on operations so that they can communicate with their children.

Service Children's Education (SCE), an MoD agency, runs 44 schools overseas catering for 13,000 Service children. The feedback on SCE schools is generally positive but some criticisms must be addressed: the governance of SCE schools, applying DfES initiatives in a timely way and funding for the education of children of personnel contracted to the MoD. The MoD should consider widening the eligibility for free education in SCE schools.

It is unacceptable that there is currently no means of determining a reliable figure for the number of Service children in UK schools. This data should be captured in the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) conducted by the DfES every January.

The system for the transfer of student records between schools is often poor and needs to be improved. There are particular problems for Service children with special needs. The DfES should consider the merits of a "Statementing passport" to overcome the need for assessments every time a child transfers school.

The Government and the devolved administrations must act in a joined-up way to ensure continuity of education for children moving between different parts of the UK. We are very concerned that Service children may be falling between the responsibilities of the DfES and the devolved administrations and recommend greater contact between the MoD and those in the devolved administrations responsible for education.

1 Introduction

Our inquiry

1. On 10 March 2006, we announced an inquiry into the education of the children of Service personnel.¹ Our intention was to examine Service schools overseas and the performance of the Ministry of Defence's agency, Service Children's Education (SCE), which is responsible for providing these schools. We also intended to examine issues affecting Service children in UK state-maintained and independent sector day and boarding schools. The motive for our inquiry was an awareness that the education of their children was a matter of major importance to Service personnel, with implications for retention and even operational effectiveness.

2. As part of our inquiry, on 22–23 March 2006, we visited two SCE schools in Germany: Bishopspark Primary School, Paderborn and King's School, a Comprehensive Secondary School in Gütersloh. During this visit we met students, parents, teachers, military personnel, and SCE officials and discussed the issues facing SCE schools and Service children overseas and at home.

3. On 24 April 2006, we visited two state-maintained schools in Colchester, Essex, both of which have a significant number of pupils who are the children of Service personnel. During our visit to Montgomery Junior School and Alderman Blaxill School we met teachers, Service families and Service children and discussed their experiences of educating Service children.

4. During our visit to Alderman Blaxill School we held a formal evidence session with students who are the children of Service personnel, Service families and teachers.² We would like to thank the students and staff of the schools we visited and particularly those at Alderman Blaxill School for hosting our evidence session and for providing such valuable evidence for our inquiry.

5. On 2 May 2006, we took oral evidence at Westminster from the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence, Mr Don Touhig MP and MoD and SCE officials. Don Touhig left the Government on 5 May 2006 and was replaced as Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Defence by Mr Tom Watson MP. We are grateful to Mr Don Touhig for giving oral evidence.

6. At our third and final evidence session on 13 June 2006, we took oral evidence from the Minister for Schools, Jim Knight MP and a DfES official.

7. We received written evidence from a wide range of organisations, including organisations involved in educating Service children, and from Service parents. We are grateful to everyone who provided oral and written evidence to our inquiry and for helping arrange our visits. We are also grateful to our Specialist Adviser, Brigadier Austin Thorp, who assisted us during this inquiry.

1 www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/defence_committee/def060310__no__26.cfm

2 For a full list of witnesses see p 57

Web forum

8. Alongside the formal written evidence and oral evidence sessions, we hosted an interactive web forum on educating Service children between 18 April and 26 May.³ A summary of the themes raised in the forum is included in the Annex to this report. We draw on the contributions to illustrate particular issues that were raised with us in our inquiry. We are grateful to all those who contributed and to the Hansard Society and the Committee Office Scrutiny Unit for their help in establishing the forum.

Web forum statistics
5,000 page hits
115 postings of which:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 12 from young people - 61 from Service families page - 17 from teachers page - 25 from schools page

9. At the mid-point of our web forum we heard informally that SCE teachers had been told not to take part in the forum. We wrote to the MoD seeking assurances that this was not the case.⁴ In response, the new Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Defence, Mr Tom Watson MP, stated that “there is every encouragement for such engagement and I am sorry if the impression has been created that this is not the case”.⁵ The Minister also stated that in line with long-standing principles, MoD-employed teachers should only comment on personal experiences and not matters of policy. In light of the Minister’s positive response to our concerns we decided to extend our web forum for a further two weeks. Activity in the teachers’ section of our forum picked up slightly, but remained disappointingly low overall.

10. The web forum provided an opportunity for us to hear the views of, and communicate with, a broad range of people, including those based overseas. We regret that SCE staff and schools were not actively encouraged to participate from the beginning but welcome the MoD’s acceptance that there is no reason why MoD employees should not contribute to fora of this kind if their purpose is to relay personal experience rather than comment on Government policy. We consider the forum to have been a valuable experience and we intend to build on this experience in future inquiries.

3 www.tellparliament.net/defcom

4 Ev 76

5 Ev 77

2 The issues facing Service children

Context

11. The nature of Service life is characterised by frequent postings, and these can place particular pressure on Service families. Operational tours put additional pressure on families in practical and emotional ways. Not least of the pressures facing Service personnel is deciding the most suitable way of educating their children and finding schools which suit them.

12. The Minister for Schools, Jim Knight MP, told us that the three main issues facing Service children were mobility, transfer of student records between schools, and special educational needs.⁶ During our inquiry these issues and others were raised as most important by Service families and children. Of central concern were student mobility and the procedures in place to mitigate its impact.

Mobility of Service children

13. Service children of school age, who accompany their parents on postings, experience a high degree of disruption to their education. This is referred to as “Mobility”, or “Turbulence”. Mobility is usually expressed as the number of pupils arriving or leaving a school at non-standard times as a percentage of the school roll (standard leaving times would be 11 years old for Primary Schools and 16 years old for Secondary schools).⁷

14. Mobility is very high in SCE schools: 82% in SCE primary schools and 58.9% in secondary schools. During our visit to Bishopspark School, Paderborn we were told that its mobility index had reached 113%. It is also high in UK schools serving garrison communities: during our visit to Montgomery Junior School, Colchester, which comprises approximately 90% Service Children, we were told that mobility had reached similar levels.

Mobility: Experience of children
“I have moved probably about 11 times”. ⁸ (a student at Alderman Blaxill School, aged 13)
“I am 11 years old. I have been at this school for about seven months. I have been to about five schools and moved house about 13 times”. ⁹ (a student at Alderman Blaxill School, aged 11)

6 Q 320

7 Ev 60, para 17

8 Q 10

9 Q 13

Emotional impact of mobility

15. The emotional impact on young people that is caused by mobility can be significant. These effects were described to us by Mrs Carolyn McKay, a Service wife, who told us that her son had experienced such unhappiness at leaving his friends at a previous school that he now guarded himself against making similarly close friendships at his present school.¹⁰ At the same evidence session, young people told us that they had experienced similar difficulties in being accepted by students at schools they had attended.¹¹

16. The 2002 Ofsted Report, “Managing Pupil Mobility”, recommended ways in which schools could manage the effects of mobility. The Report suggested in particular that schools should forge relationships with parents quickly, gain information on an individual student’s attainment quickly and provide them with tailored personal support.¹²

17. Witnesses told us about effective strategies employed by schools to help Service children settle in to their new school. Alderman Blaxill School, which comprises approximately 20% Service students, operates a “buddy system” where pupils are assigned the responsibility of helping new students settle into the school.¹³ Bishopspark Primary School in Paderborn, Germany, sets an induction programme for new students which includes familiarisation meetings with parents and a buddy system. Mrs Maria Barber-Riley told us that Montgomery Junior School had provided very good support to her child when he arrived.¹⁴

18. It can help children if they have some contact with a school before a move. Derek Jones, Assistant Head Teacher, Alderman Blaxill School, told us of his experience of liaising with the Army and Army families overseas with the intention of telling them about the school and the town of Colchester before they were posted there.¹⁵

19. Moving schools is stressful for all children and frequent moves can have a significant detrimental impact on young people, particularly on their willingness to form friendships with their peers. Some schools have developed imaginative ways to help students settle in to their new schools. We recommend the DfES work with the MoD to develop best practice guidance for schools on helping Service children adapt as smoothly as possible to their new school environment.

Impact on educational attainment

20. The Minister for Schools told us that “we know mobility and turbulence have a profound effect on the attainment of children but that it is very difficult to mitigate it”.¹⁶ The 2002 Ofsted Report, “Managing Pupil Mobility”, stated that secondary schools with

10 Q 123

11 Q 22

12 Ofsted Report, *Managing Pupil Mobility*, March 2002

13 Q 25

14 Q 140

15 Q 156

16 Q 357

high mobility tended to record lower than average pupil results. The report recorded that “almost all schools with mobility above 15% have average GCSE scores below the national average” but noted that “it is difficult to isolate the effect of pupil mobility on attainment because it often occurs alongside other factors, such as disrupted family life”.¹⁷ The report also noted that the relationship between mobility and attainment is stronger for children in secondary, rather than primary education.¹⁸

21. Difficulties are heightened when children move between SCE schools or English Schools and schools in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, each of which follow a different curriculum and a different examination system. Kathryn Forsyth told us that SCE schools had strong links with Scottish schools and procedures in place to mitigate the difficulties of children transferring to Scottish schools:

When children are returning to Scotland, we will send a transcript to show what the child has studied in terms of the English curriculum and we will identify for Scottish teachers areas they may not have covered in such detail according to their own curriculum.¹⁹

22. We pressed the Minister for Schools about what responsibility the DfES had in respect of students moving between schools in different parts of the UK. He told us:

If the transfer of a child from England to Scotland takes place the responsibility goes from the DfES to the Scottish Executive; if it is a transfer from overseas to Scotland or Wales or Northern Ireland it goes to the competent authority in accordance with the devolution settlement.²⁰

The Minister also told us, “I am not aware of a dialogue [between devolved bodies, the MoD and DfES] specific to Service children”.²¹

Postings to our web forum: impact of mobility on Service children
--

<p>“Both my children have suffered from postings during GCSE and A level courses, one is a whole year behind their peers” (from a Serving soldier).</p>

<p>“The [education] system in Scotland is so different from that in SCE. We have no links with the Scottish examination system so incoming students had to adjust to our curriculum” (from an SCE-employed teacher).</p>
--

17 Ofsted Report, *Managing Pupil Mobility*, March 2002, page 7

18 *Ibid.*, page 6

19 Q 284

20 Q 339

21 Q 341

23. **We are very concerned that Service children may be falling between the responsibilities of the DfES and the devolved administrations. They must act in a joined-up way to ensure continuity of education for children moving between the different parts of the UK. This is an area which the DfES needs to address urgently. We also recommend greater contact between the MoD and those in the devolved administrations responsible for education.**

24. **Mobility can negatively affect a student's educational attainment, particularly in the lead-up to key stages and GCSEs and A levels. We recommend that the DfES work closely with the MoD, SCE and devolved administrations to identify ways to mitigate the impact of mobility.**

25. In the longer term, it is to be expected that the end of the Arms Plot, which required the regular relocation of infantry battalions, and the move to rationalise the Defence Estate on "Super Garrisons", will reduce the frequency of moves for Service families. But some mobility is likely to be an enduring feature of Service life.

26. **The MoD and local education authorities should begin planning for the impact that the creation of Super Garrisons will have on pupil numbers in schools located near Service bases.**

Deployments

27. The impact on a child's emotional well-being caused by separation from a parent for significant period of time is heightened when that parent is deployed on operations. The young people who gave evidence to us at Alderman Blaxill School told us how unsettling it could be when their parents were on operational tours and of the difficulties that could arise when they returned. One of them told us:

Sometimes it is scary because he does not seem to be the same person he was when he left because he has got to get over what he has been through out there and obviously we changed an awful lot in the seven months he has been out there.²²

28. Mr Anthony Evans, a serving soldier currently based at Colchester, told us that when he went on operational tours the behaviour of his children changed markedly. One child would become quick-tempered and the other would become apathetic.²³ Mr Evans attributed these changes in behaviour to the fact that he was away from home so often.²⁴ At Montgomery Junior School we were told that the behaviour of pupils sometimes deteriorated when their parents were on operational tours.

29. Frequent communication with a parent can help. Some of the students at Alderman Blaxill were children of Service personnel in the 16 Air Assault Brigade, currently deployed in Afghanistan. They told us that communication from Afghanistan was difficult and

22 Q 46

23 Q 144

24 Q 145

restricted to three “e-blueys” per week and that a telephone connection with Afghanistan would not be set up until June.²⁵

30. Communication was cited when we invited parents at Alderman Blaxill to suggest a single improvement they would wish for from the MoD. Mrs Carolyn Mackay, whose husband was serving in Afghanistan, told us:

My wish on behalf of my children would be that there were more satellite telephones. Not that they had longer, I am not asking for more minutes, just for more phones. You were asking the children earlier on about speaking to dad and there are 200 men queuing for one telephone. I am not asking for more money, just more phones.²⁶

31. We pressed the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Defence on the communications provision for operational deployments. The MoD’s second memorandum states that it is committed to providing within one month of deployment: 1 telephone for 50 people (20 minutes per call per week) and Internet terminals (for the use of email) provided at a ratio of 1 to 100 people, and free regular postage facilities.²⁷ The MoD states that this level of provision has now been established in Afghanistan.

32. We note the importance of regular communications between deployed Service personnel and their families. Young people can feel particular anxiety during this time and their educational attainment and general well-being can be affected. The provision of communication facilities, and the regular opportunity to use them, can help both Service personnel and their families maintain their morale during operational tours.

Special educational needs

33. During our inquiry we heard from Service parents about the particular difficulties facing those of them with a child with Special Needs.

34. The Education Act 1996, states that children have Special Educational Needs (SEN) if:

they have a significantly greater difficulty learning than the majority of children of the same age or have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in schools within the area of the local authority.²⁸

The 1996 Act stipulates that LEAs have a duty to identify, assess and make provision for children with special needs and to keep their arrangements for doing so under review.²⁹ The provision of support for children with special needs is graduated from support provided within a school, known as School Action and School Action Plus to ‘Statementing’ where support is provided by special needs specialists, often drawn from external resources. Statements are based on specialist reports from an education

25 Deployed Servicemen are entitled to a free aerogramme to send to friends and families, commonly referred to as a bluey. An e-bluey is the electronic version of this and is similar to a conventional e-mail

26 Q 152

27 Ev 74

28 Education and Skills Committee, Third Report of Session 2005–06, *Special Educational Needs*, HC 478, Ev 11, para 7

29 *Ibid.*, Ev 11, para 12

psychologist, health and social care professionals and others and set out in detail the special educational provision to be made for a child. Once a Statement is made, the 1996 Act requires the relevant Local Authority to arrange the special educational provision specified in it.³⁰

35. The submission by Wiltshire County Council suggests that approximately 5% of Service children in Wiltshire have Statements of special educational need, compared with an overall level of approximately 2.1%. We have also received some anecdotal comment that a higher proportion of Service children have special needs compared to the general population, but this cannot be verified owing to the absence of reliable data.³¹

36. At our evidence session in Colchester, Service parents of children with Special Needs complained to us that Statements were not transferable between schools, or between UK schools and SCE. Schools were obliged by LEAs to reassess students on arrival from schools outside the LEA. Mrs Heather Wheeler, a Service wife, told us:

You might be getting to the root of a problem with a child who has had an on-going problem and then you are posted elsewhere and have to go through the whole rigmarole again.³²

Mrs Maria Barber Riley told us:

My experience with regard to special needs—my son has special needs—has been quite poor on the whole with regard to having to move round different counties and trying to get a statement of educational needs. You have to start the whole process over again depending on which county you are in.³³

Mrs Michelle Dunn told us that the process could take “anything between six months and two years”.³⁴

37. Teachers at Montgomery Junior School told us that the speed of assessments varied greatly between local education authorities, depending on the resources available. They described an instance where a child with Special Needs had not been assessed by an educational psychologist until almost two years after joining school.

Postings to our web forum: children with special educational needs

“The number of children who have lost their Statements never ceases to amaze me.” (Head Teacher of UK Primary School)

30 Education and Skills Committee Report, Third Report of Session 2005–06, Special Educational Needs, HC 478, Ev 11, para 14

31 Ev 97, para 2

32 Q 123

33 Q 106

34 Q 110

38. The Minister for Schools conceded it was possible that schools with large numbers of Service children lacked a strong enough incentive to go through the Statementing process due to the high mobility associated with Service children.³⁵ On the other hand, he assured us that 92% of statements were produced within the statutory 18 weeks.³⁶

39. When we questioned the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Defence, Mr Don Touhig MP, about the problems faced by Service children with special needs, he told us:

I have a passion about us doing something better for special educational needs and, indeed, have been talking to my officials about the possibility of a ‘Statementing passport’... it would clearly involve the very close collaboration and support of other departments, DfES in particular, to do that.³⁷

40. We put the idea of a “Statementing passport” to the Minister for Schools. He thought it was “an interesting idea” but cautioned that procedures would have to be in place to ensure statements were updated regularly. He had particular concerns about the low number of educational psychologists which can be called on by SCE schools.³⁸

41. The Education and Skills Committee has recently concluded an extensive inquiry into Special Educational Needs.³⁹ Its report identifies problems with the procedures for supporting all children with Special Needs and makes a number of recommendations for improving the support mechanisms. The evidence we received in our inquiry suggests that these difficulties are compounded for Service children with special needs owing to the frequency with which they move schools.

42. The difficulties experienced by some Service families in getting their child assessed by an educational psychologist for Statementing purposes and the consequent delays in the provision of support to those children is unacceptable. Schools and local authorities should give the needs of Service children with Special Needs equal priority to those of any other child.

43. We are concerned at the evidence we have received that SCE lacks sufficient numbers of educational psychologists. We call upon the MoD to ensure that SCE schools are able to call on the services of accredited educational psychologists within a reasonable time.

44. We recommend that the DfES and the MoD consider introducing, as a priority, a system whereby Service children with Special Needs are given a Statement of educational needs which can be taken with them as they move between schools, and is accepted by schools as the basis for support which they will provide. The Statement should be time-limited and reviewed regularly.

35 Q 367

36 Q 366

37 Q 196

38 Q 363

39 Education and Skills Committee Report, Third Report of Session 2005–06, *Special Educational Needs*, HC 478

45. We note the former Defence Minister’s tentative suggestion of a “Statementing passport” for Service children with special needs. We recommend that the feasibility of a Statementing passport be explored further by his successor.

Support for Service parents

46. During our inquiry, we were told by Service parents about the importance of good quality advice and information about the educational opportunities available to their children. The MoD’s submission states that advice for parents is available from “a network of resources including HIVE,⁴⁰ Service websites, the Service Families Federations and the MoD website” and that “lead responsibility falls to the Children’s Education Advisory Service”.⁴¹

47. The CEAS is part of the MoD and reports to the Adjutant General. Its role is to “provide information to Service parents on schooling in the United Kingdom and abroad”. During our inquiry we received some positive feedback regarding the CEAS but, during our visits to SCE schools and schools in Colchester, we became aware that many of the parents we met had not heard of the CEAS and the service it provides.

48. Brigadier Brister, Director, Educational and Training Services (Army), recognised that the profile of the CEAS was a problem:

In terms of CEAS and the awareness of what it has to offer within the Services, certainly we are acutely conscious that there are still some people who are not aware of what is on offer and we will address that.⁴²

We asked Brigadier Brister why the CEAS offered a primarily telephone-based advice service to parents and had such a limited web-based presence. Brigadier Brister recognised the advantages that an accessible website could have and told us that he was hopeful that a new improved website would go live by the end of May.⁴³ We note that an improved website went on-line shortly before the end of our inquiry at the beginning of July. We believe that it would benefit from further improvement.

49. Service parents need reliable and accessible information when making key decisions about their child’s education. We note the positive feedback we received from parents who had used the Children’s Education Advisory Service but also the low profile of the CEAS amongst the Service parents we met. We recommend that the MoD provide the necessary resources to raise the profile of the CEAS amongst Service families so that it can provide its important advice service to a larger number of Service parents.

50. We believe that in today’s information age, a website is an essential conduit for information between organisations and clients. We recommend that the MoD provide

40 The HIVE information service is a tri-Service information network, providing information on a range of welfare issues to all Service personnel

41 Ev 68

42 Q 242

43 Q 241

the CEAS with the necessary resources for an effective and visible website and that it do so speedily.

3 Service Children's Education

The role of SCE

51. SCE was formed in 1996, following the merger of Service Children's Schools (North West Europe) Defence Agency and the Service Children's Education Authority. SCE is an MoD agency responsible for educating Service children, and children of MoD officials, based overseas.⁴⁴

52. The Adjutant General, on behalf of the Secretary of State for Defence, is responsible for the performance of SCE.⁴⁵ The Adjutant General chairs the SCE Owners Board which includes officials from the MoD, DfES and Ofsted.⁴⁶ The SCE Owners Board advises the Adjutant General on education best practice and the setting of key targets. The day-to-day management of SCE is the responsibility of the Chief Executive. According to the MoD submission, SCE is "subject to the main requirements of other agencies, e.g. submitting annual reports to Parliament, target setting, and working closely with Ministers".⁴⁷

53. The Chief Executive of SCE, David Wadsworth, is a former secondary school teacher and Chief Education Officer of Bedfordshire County Council. The SCE employs 2,200 people comprising 750 teachers, and Learning Support Assistants, Foundation Stage Key Workers and other schools support staff.⁴⁸

SCE schools

54. In total, SCE educates approximately 13,000 children in 44 schools located in 10 countries around the world.⁴⁹ Of these 44 schools, 36 are primary schools, two are middle schools and six are secondary schools. All are run on comprehensive lines and follow the English National Curriculum.⁵⁰ There are 30 SCE schools in Germany: 4 secondary, 2 middle and 24 primary. These schools educate 8,643 children and young people.⁵¹ Cyprus has 6 SCE schools: 2 secondary and 4 primary. There is a SCE primary school in Belgium, Belize, Brunei, Denmark, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Italy, and the Netherlands.⁵² SCE provides 41 pre-schools, referred to as "Foundation Stage Settings", for three year olds, linked to first and junior schools.

44 Ev 59, para2

45 Service Children's Education Agency, Corporate Plan, 2004–2009, page 5

46 Ev 59, para 6

47 Ev 59, para 1

48 Service Children's Education Agency, Corporate Plan, 2004–2009, page 4

49 *Ibid.*

50 Q 284, Ev 86

51 Ofsted Inspection Report, Service Children's Education Headquarters, June 2004, page 4

52 Service Children's Education Agency, Corporate Plan, 2004–2009, page 4

55. SCE also provides help and advice to Service and MoD personnel’s families, about to be posted overseas or returning to the UK, including advice regarding boarding provision within the UK.⁵³

SCE relationship with the DfES

56. In 2002, a Quinquennial Review (QQR) was undertaken into the performance of the SCE headquarters. The QQR concluded that SCE should remain as a MoD agency and that it was providing a good service to the families of Service personnel and providing value for money.⁵⁴

57. We questioned the Minister for Schools about the appropriateness of the MoD having responsibility for schools overseas. He told us that he saw no value in the DfES taking over responsibility for SCE schools overseas and that the MoD remained the favoured lead department because it ensured that the needs of Service children remained a priority.⁵⁵ The Minister did note, however, that the DfES could “join up” more with the MoD in relation to SCE schools and that there was potential scope for the DfES treating SCE “a little more like a local authority”.⁵⁶

58. The relationship between the DfES, which is responsible for education policy in England, and the SCE was described to us by the Minister for Schools as “hands-off”.⁵⁷ While the Minister drew attention to Ofsted’s role in inspecting SCE schools, and the inclusion of DfES officials on the SCE Owners Board, he made clear that SCE was very much the responsibility of the MoD.⁵⁸ The Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Defence, told us that collaboration with the DfES was “very much on a case by case basis”.⁵⁹

59. While it may seem curious that the MoD should be responsible for providing schools, it is unquestionably the Department with the closest interest in the education of Service children and the issues facing them. We see no reason to call for any change in the status of SCE as an MoD agency.

60. Both the MoD and the DfES expressed satisfaction with their current working relationship with regard to SCE schools, but saw potential for closer collaboration. We are concerned by the Minister for School’s description of the DfES relationship with the MoD as “hands-off”. We believe closer collaboration and a greater interest in Service children by the DfES to be essential.

53 www.sceschools.com/

54 Ev 59, para 3

55 Q 307

56 *Ibid.*

57 Q 303

58 *Ibid.*

59 Q 196

Performance of SCE schools

61. MoD’s submission notes that the performance of SCE schools compares favourably with English schools and that they are in “the leading 25 (of 150) Local Education Authority league tables at each of the key stages 1, 2 and 3”.⁶⁰ Ms Sue Garner, Head of School Admissions, DfES, told us:

The schools provided by SCE abroad provide a very good education. If one looks at them in comparison with many English local education authority schools they are above average; they are in the top 25 per cent.⁶¹

We have no information about the position in Scotland and Wales.

62. In 2004, HQ SCE was inspected by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). Ofsted identified a number of concerns about the quality of service provided by SCE schools particularly with regard for the provision of support to children with special educational needs, ethnic minority children and gifted children.⁶² The MoD submission states that these areas of weaknesses, as identified by Ofsted, have since been addressed.⁶³

63. Since 2005, Ofsted has been inspecting up to 14 schools per year on a rolling programme to be completed by December 2008.⁶⁴ Of the seven SCE schools inspected by Ofsted since 2005, two schools were judged outstanding, four good and one school was judged inadequate.⁶⁵

Postings to our web forum: SCE schools
“in Germany, SCE schools are the backbone of our community” (retired Officer)
“I have nothing but praise for the outstanding [SCE] school.” (Service parent, Germany)
“the relationship between parents, teachers and children is a partnership for the benefit of the child, in or outside of school”(Service parent, Germany)
“Having compared notes with UK colleagues and friends I am in no doubt that we are very well served both in the quality, standards and availability of our pre-school provision which I believe is well above the government target.” (Service parent, Germany)

60 Ev 59, para 9

61 Q 315

62 Ofsted Inspection Report, Service Children’s Education Headquarters, June 2004

63 Ev 60, para 14

64 Ev 87, para 2.1

65 Further details about Ofsted inspections can be found at www.ofsted.co.uk

64. In general, the teachers and families we met during our visit to Bishopspark Primary School, Paderborn, and King’s School, Gütersloh, shared the positive assessment of SCE schools reflected in the memoranda from the DfES and Ofsted. We received particularly positive feedback about life in SCE schools from the pupils of St Christopher’s School, Gibraltar, who told us about the benefits of living in a different culture and of learning new languages in SCE schools overseas. At Paderborn we also heard good reports of the pre-school for 3 year olds. However, we heard that many Service personnel—particularly officers and Senior NCOs—chose to move their children to boarding schools in the UK at the secondary stage. **The written evidence we have received, and the contributions posted to our web forum, were generally positive about the quality of schooling provided by SCE schools, particularly at primary level.**

Governance arrangements

65. The 2004 Ofsted Inspection of SCE identified weaknesses in the external governance arrangements of SCE schools.⁶⁶ SCE schools are supported by “Schools Advisory Committees” comprising nine members chaired by a serving military officer.⁶⁷ Schools Advisory Committees have less power than governing bodies in maintained schools. In particular, School Advisory Committees have no executive power and no powers to dismiss teachers.⁶⁸ The MoD attributes the different status to “the inapplicability of English law to overseas locations (and with it the granting of certain executive powers to school governing bodies)”.⁶⁹

66. The Ofsted Inspection expressed concern that School Advisory Committees demonstrated a lack of familiarity with their terms of reference and little involvement in the teaching in the schools.⁷⁰ The lack of familiarity was compounded by the “rapid turnover in committee membership”.⁷¹

67. The Ofsted Inspection also expressed concern that “Head Teachers do not receive the extra level of support and challenge on an everyday basis that is so often provided by governors in England”.⁷² During our visit to King’s School, Gütersloh, some parents told us of their concerns of an absence of a transparent complaints procedure. Similar concerns were also raised in our web forum.

66 Ofsted Inspection Report, Service Children’s Education Headquarters, June 2004

67 *Ibid.*, para 108

68 *Ibid.*

69 Ev 61, para 30

70 Ofsted Inspection Report, Service Children’s Education Headquarters, June 2004, para 109

71 *Ibid.*

72 Ofsted Inspection Report, Service Children’s Education Headquarters, June 2004, June 2004, para 112

Postings to our web forum: Complaining about SCE schools (from Service parents)

“Parents are not made aware of the next step if they wish to take a complaint further”

“Parents believe they may compromise their career prospects in the military if they ‘make a fuss’”

“I would like to see an independent body responsible for dealing with complaints about Service children’s schools”

68. The MoD told us that in response to the Ofsted assessment it would strengthen the role and clarify the terms of reference of Schools Advisory Committees by September 2006.⁷³

69. We are not convinced by the reasons given by the MoD for the governance arrangements for SCE schools and recommend that the MoD consider the feasibility of giving Schools Advisory Committees powers equivalent to those exercised by governing bodies in UK maintained schools. We believe that this would help to ensure that high standards of performance are achieved. In the short term, the MoD should take steps to ensure that members of Schools Advisory Committees assume a more active role in school life and that they receive appropriate training to do this effectively.

Funding

70. SCE schools are funded from the MoD’s budget, as set by the Treasury.⁷⁴ In 2003–04, following concerns of the SCE Owners’ Board that the SCE budget was not being increased in line with increases to the DfES budget, the Secretary of State for Defence agreed to match the levels of additional resources for UK schools.⁷⁵ The SCE 2004–09 Corporate Plan notes with satisfaction that parity funding with DfES had been reached “after two or three years of trying”.⁷⁶

71. In 2005–06 SCE’s budget was over £70 million and is planned to rise to over £75 million in 2007–08. David Wadsworth, Chief Executive, SCE, told us that spending per pupil by SCE was comparable to the guidelines set by the DfES for schools in England—approximately £5,000 per pupil per annum.⁷⁷

72. The implications for the defence budget of this commitment are considerable. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Defence told us:

73 Ev 62, para 32

74 Service Children’s Education Agency, Corporate Plan, 2004–2009, page 30

75 *Ibid.*

76 *Ibid.*

77 Q 277

over four years parity funding will cost an additional £46.5 million to be found by the MoD. The gap will be wider with any further educational grants that the Chancellor was to provide [to DfES].⁷⁸

73. We received a submission from the Head Teacher of an SCE school which stated there was a time lag, sometimes for up to a year, between the announcement of Treasury spending announcements for the DfES and the equivalent funding reaching SCE schools.⁷⁹ The submission also stated that

We have received little of the extra-funding made available to secondary schools over the last five years in the UK. We are being told by HQ SCE that we have to wait for this extra funding.⁸⁰

74. When we pressed the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence about his plans to ensure the continuation of parity funding, he told us, with disarming honesty, that he had not given it sufficient attention: “It had not clicked with me before that the extra monies that were announced do not flow through in the way that they do in England and the devolved administrations”.⁸¹

75. We suggested to the Minister for Schools that any additional funding earmarked for the DfES budget should be matched by a comparable amount made available for SCE schools. The Minister agreed with our suggestion and undertook to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to express this view.⁸²

76. We welcome the MoD’s commitment to give additional funding to SCE to match increases to the DfES budget, but we are concerned to ensure that this funding is provided by HM Treasury rather than from already allocated MoD resources. We expect the Treasury to make available proportional funding to the MoD whenever it increases the schools budget. We expect the MoD to ensure that parity funding for SCE schools continues.

Applying DfES initiatives to SCE schools

77. During our visit to SCE schools in Germany, we heard concerns from teachers and parents that some DfES policy initiatives introduced to English schools were not being implemented in SCE schools in Germany. There was particular concern that the DfES “Extended Schools Initiative” was not being implemented in SCE schools;⁸³ that the provision of careers advice to students planning to leave SCE schools was poor, and that opportunities for vocational training and work placements were limited.

78 Q 279

79 Ev 112, para 4

80 *Ibid.*

81 Q 279

82 Q 352

83 The intent of the DfES Extended Schools initiative is for schools to make their facilities available for use by the wider community for a range of activities outside the hours of the regular school day

78. We pressed David Wadsworth for assurance that young people in SCE schools receive effective advice and support when deciding on career options and when applying to University. He told us that the careers advice provided by SCE to young children was:

Probably better than you would find in most English LEAs. There is a careers adviser based in each SCE High School. Their remit also extends to those who have left school but remain overseas with their families.⁸⁴

79. We asked the Minister about the implementation of the Extended Schools Initiative in SCE schools.⁸⁵ Following the evidence session, the MoD made a supplementary submission which stated:

The DfES concept of extended schools, and the provision of extended learning opportunities to pupils and families, is fully supported by SCE and the Agency already provides an extended schools service in a number of locations and is working towards extending that provision further.⁸⁶

80. While we note SCE's commitment to implementing DfES initiatives such as the Extended Schools Initiative, we are concerned that there is a perceived time-lag before they are implemented in SCE schools. The proposals for more "personalised learning" contained in the DfES White Paper, "Higher Standards, Better Schools for All" have significant implications on the way children will be taught in UK schools as well as a significant implementation budget (£235 million in 2007–08).⁸⁷ It is unclear whether the proposals for personalised learning will be applied to SCE schools and what extra funds will be available to implement them. **It is vital that the interests of SCE schools are taken into account when DfES initiatives are introduced, and that SCE is resourced adequately to implement them.**

Children of MoD contractors

81. All children of Service personnel serving overseas, as well as the children of MoD civil Servants and organisations such as the Navy Army Air Force Institutes (NAAFI), are entitled to free education in SCE schools.⁸⁸ Many Service personnel, serving overseas, choose to have their families with them and the existence of SCE schools in Germany makes this possible.

82. During our inquiry we were told that the children of some contract workers, undertaking important work for the Services overseas, were not entitled to free SCE schooling.

84 Q 264

85 Q 274

86 Ev 76, para 1

87 DfES, *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All*, Cm 6677, October 2005

88 Q 291

Postings to our web forum: schooling for children of contractors

“there are contractors working for the MOD on high wages who could probably afford the cost of education for SCE or who have this included in their ‘package’, I feel that ‘contractors’ on low wages, working for non-profit making charities who are posted regularly and deployed with the Army are an exception to the rule and should have education included in their contract.” (wife of a contractor)

“Why can I go to school in England for free and I’m not allowed to in Germany? My dad looks after all the soldiers and all the children and us at home but there is no one to pay for my English school.” (child of a contractor)

83. We asked the Minister for Schools whether he considered contractors working for MoD should be eligible for free schooling in SCE schools. The Minister undertook to consider the situation they faced.⁸⁹

84. We recommend that the MoD consider broadening its criteria for deciding which of its contract workers are eligible for free education in SCE schools. It appears unfair that some contracted staff, performing important responsibilities for the Services, are not entitled to free schooling in SCE schools.

4 Educating Service children in UK maintained schools

Defining Service children

85. The majority of Service children are educated in LEA maintained schools in the UK. In 2004, Ofsted estimated that there were 90,000 Service children in UK schools.⁹⁰ The submission from Mike Curtis, Head Teacher, Carterton Primary School, Oxfordshire and Chairman of the Service Children In State Schools working group (SCISS),⁹¹ put the figure at 186,000.⁹² The variance in these estimates can be attributed, at least in part, to the absence of an accepted definition of who is a Service child and the lack of a mechanism by which data on Service children are collected.

86. The submission from the SCISS working group stated that it was important to define Service children broadly because many children, whose parents had left the Services or become divorced, would continue to be affected by many of the issues associated with being a Service child.⁹³ SCISS also suggested that a robust definition would enable much needed research to be undertaken on the educational attainment of Service children.

87. We asked Ms Sue Garner, Head of the School Admissions and Class Size Unit, DfES, whether the DfES had a definition for a Service child and she told us that if she wanted a definition, she would ask the MoD for it.⁹⁴

88. We were surprised to discover that there does not seem to be a clear working definition of what a Service child is. Without an accepted definition, a reliable figure for the number of Service children cannot be determined and decisions about funding for Service children and the tracking of the educational attainment of Service children, is not possible.

89. We share SCISS's view that defining Service children as a child who currently has one or more parent serving in the UK Armed Forces is too narrow as it would allow no tracking of the educational attainment of children whose parent leaves the Services midway through their school career. On the other hand, including all children who have a parent who was at one time in the Services is probably too broad.

90. We recommend that the MoD and the DfES treat as a Service child any child of school age whose parent has served in the UK Armed Forces during that child's school career.

90 Ofsted Inspection Report, Service Children's Education Headquarters, June 2004, para 15

91 SCISS was established in 2004 and comprises Head teachers of Service schools, DfES and MoD officials

92 Ev 57, para C.1

93 *Ibid.*, para C.3

94 Q 326

Identification of Service children

91. Data on all pupils in maintained schools are collected via the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) commissioned by the DfES every January.⁹⁵ The data collected in the PLASC identifies the number of pupils on a school roll and includes information such as the number of free school meals it provides, and the number of pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN). These factors, referred to as Additional Educational Needs, contribute to determining a school's eligibility for funding above the Dedicated Schools Grant.⁹⁶

92. The PLASC does not, at present, require schools to identify Service children.⁹⁷ The case for it to do so was presented to us in a wide range of evidence we received including from schools, SCISS, the MoD and Wiltshire County Council.⁹⁸ Mike Curtis told us that “one of the first things that needs to be done is find out where these [Service] children are”.⁹⁹ The SCISS working group maintain that the number of Service children in a school should be considered, alongside the number of free school meals it provides, as an indicator of a school's funding requirement so that a school has the necessary resources to meet its particular needs.¹⁰⁰

93. Brigadier Brister told us that “it would be hugely useful to have this information and I would very much like to have that information”.¹⁰¹ Wiltshire County Council conducts its own school census, which includes a marker for Service children, to assist it in identifying the particular needs of Service children.¹⁰²

94. The submission from the DfES states that Ministers had provisionally agreed for “a Service children's marker to be included in the census for 2006–07” but that this decision was later rejected because it considered the potential burden of collecting the data would outweigh the benefits of doing so.¹⁰³ We were told by Sue Garner that the DfES had decided not to include information on Service children because:

when the matter went to the focus group of head teachers and local authorities they could not see the need for it nationally even though I thought we had made quite a good case for it.¹⁰⁴

Mike Curtis maintains that “It would be a simple task to add a tick box to the data held in schools which would identify children who had parents in the armed forces”.¹⁰⁵

95 Ev 80, para 13

96 *Ibid.*, para 9

97 *Ibid.*, para 13

98 Ev 56, Ev 58, Ev 96

99 Q 180

100 Ev 57, para B16

101 Q 272

102 Ev 97, para 6

103 Ev 80, para 14

104 Q 321

105 Ev 57, para C.1

95. We recognise that many LEAs do not have a significant number of Service children in their schools and would gain little benefit if the PLASC included a requirement for schools to identify Service children. For the DfES to reject the proposal on the ground that a sample focus group was not in favour is simply ridiculous, and a sad reflection of the importance which the DfES attaches to Service children. The collection of data on the number of Service children, through the national PLASC census, would bring benefit to the DfES, the MoD, SCE and LEAs. This information would assist the targeting of resources for Service children more effectively and enable trends in the attainment of Service children to be established.

96. We do not consider its inclusion in the PLASC exercise would prove unduly burdensome for schools and the benefits it would bring are considerable. We recommend strongly that the DfES include a Service children marker in its annual PLASC exercise.

Funding for schools experiencing high mobility

97. The funding mechanism for schools is currently undergoing a period of change. From the 2006–07 financial year, the DfES is providing LEAs with a Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) which LEAs are required to transfer to schools according to a locally set formula.¹⁰⁶

98. The SCISS submission argues that schools with Service children require more resources, over and above the additional funding which an LEA might provide to compensate for mobility.¹⁰⁷ Tina Evans, Head Teacher, Zouch Primary School, Wiltshire, and Mike Curtis, Head Teacher, Carterton Primary School, Oxfordshire, both told us that the DSG should include additional funding for schools with Service children. They argue that this would help schools ensure that “the admin support is done well, funding is available to get the child assessed and on-going support is available for any child with special needs”.¹⁰⁸ Tina Evans proposed that an additional £220 per child should be made available by the DfES to fund this extra resource.¹⁰⁹

99. Some LEAs, such as Wiltshire and Oxfordshire, choose to provide additional funding for schools with significant numbers of Service children, from their own budget, based upon the percentage of Service children in their schools.¹¹⁰ In Wiltshire, additional funding is provided for primary schools with excess of 25% and Secondary schools with excess of 20% Service children.¹¹¹ The submission from Wiltshire County Council states that this extra funding is drawn from locally-raised revenue (Council Tax) and that these allocations are made at the expense of those schools without Service children. The submission from Wiltshire County Council recommended that additional financial support for Service

106 HC Library Standard Note, SNSP/03740

107 Ev 58, para C.6

108 Q 170

109 Q 171

110 Q 180

111 Ev 97, para 5

children should form part of the calculation of the DfES-determined Dedicated Schools Grant.¹¹²

100. In its submission, the DfES states that the LEA is the right level to address funding for schools with significant levels of Service children.¹¹³ The DfES submission also states that it considered, and then rejected, the option of including a Service children element to the DSG.¹¹⁴ The DfES rejected this option because:

Mobility is very widespread and affects a number of groups—travellers, looked after children, some socially deprived groups as well as Service families. Data show that introducing an extra factor for mobility into the [funding] formula would spread the funding for deprivation more widely.¹¹⁵

101. Service children mobility undoubtedly places additional pressures on schools in terms of time needed to undertake administrative tasks and child assessments. On the other hand, mobility is not an issue which affects schools with Service children uniquely and LEAs in Inner London—for example—experience comparable levels of mobility.

102. All LEAs face different challenges and demands on their resources. Significant disparities in the funding needs of individual schools exist within LEAs. We believe that it is appropriate that funding decisions concerning individual schools are made at a local level, by LEAs, through its locally-determined funding formula. We commend to LEAs the example of Wiltshire County Council which provides additional funding for its schools with significant numbers of Service children.

Notice of postings and School Admissions Policy

103. During our inquiry we heard accounts of the difficulties faced by Service families when trying to find a school for their children in advance of a UK posting. A common complaint from Service parents was that the advance notice of postings, and of the address of their new quarters, was insufficient for them to identify a suitable school and make an application within the normal schools admissions timetable which normally requires receipt of applications many months before.

104. The submission from Confed, representing Directors and Managers of Children's Services in local authorities in England and Wales, noted that:

At the point at which all parents are asked to decide on a school for their children, they might not know that they will be moving to a particular area. Even if they do know, it might not be possible to visit local schools because they are abroad or elsewhere at this time.¹¹⁶

112 Ev 97, para 5

113 Ev 80, para 11

114 *Ibid.*, para 14

115 *Ibid.*, para 11

116 Ev 92, para 3.1

105. We were told by Brigadier Brister that the Army has a target of “no less than four months’ notice [of postings] for 65% of Army people who are posted... that is the minimum target: the Army strives to go beyond the 65%”.¹¹⁷ This means that the Army considers it acceptable that over one third of Army personnel receive less than four months’ notice of postings. **While we recognise the logistical challenge and the need for occasional unexpected postings, we recommend that the MoD adopt a more rigorous target for notice of postings.**

106. Receiving a notice of posting is not the end of the process. We were told by Service parents that LEAs required school applications to be made from a fixed postal address and some Service parents had experience of receiving confirmation of their new address only 28 days before they moved.¹¹⁸ This invariably means that parents have to experience the potentially stressful experience of appealing to schools to reconsider their decision. This is particularly unfortunate given the number of times Service children have to change schools.

107. The MoD submission notes that:

Service families are almost exclusively outside the normal admissions process and are what is known as Casual or Additional admissions. This means that in order to gain a place in their preferred or any popular school they must always go through the appeals process.¹¹⁹

We have heard from parents that the appeals process is stressful and the uncertainty for their children can add to the anxiety of a move. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence told us that he “recognised there was a problem with admissions” and that his officials were working with the DfES to address them.¹²⁰

108. We put these concerns to the Minister for Schools. We were pleased to receive his undertaking that he would issue guidance to local education authorities that they should accept a unit postal address from Servicemen when applying to schools and that this guidance would be incorporated in the DfES Schools Admission Code of Practice, due to be revised and issued to LEAs in the Autumn of 2006.¹²¹

109. The difficulty in finding a school can be heightened when applying while based overseas. In Germany we were told by a Service wife of the difficulties she was experiencing in finding a UK school while her husband was deployed in Iraq. She received no assistance, financial or practical, to visit the UK to look for a school. **We recommend that the MoD consider how parents living abroad can be assisted better to find schools in the UK, particularly when their spouse is away on an operational deployment.**

117 Q 205

118 Q 130

119 Ev 70, para 3

120 Q 215

121 Q 369

110. We welcome the commitment by the Minister for Schools that the DfES would advise local authorities to accept unit postal addresses from which to apply to new schools.

Communication between the MoD and schools

111. We were told by Head Teachers of English schools that they would appreciate better communication with the MoD particularly regarding notice of significant postings of Service personnel to local garrisons. Mike Curtis told us that he received his best information about planned MoD postings to RAF Brize Norton (located near Carterton Primary School) from chatting to friends in his local village pub.¹²²

112. The submission from Zouch Primary School Board of Governors illustrated the importance that prior notice of postings and defective communication between the MoD and schools can have on a school's ability to plan and budget effectively.¹²³ Following a recent re-deployment of a unit based at Tidworth, 45 children left the school roll. When the replacement unit arrived it was based elsewhere in the county. As a result, the school had two more teachers than it needed and experienced a year-end budget deficit.¹²⁴

113. During our visit to Montgomery Junior School, we heard a similar account of the disruptive effect on the school of large movements of Service personnel in the lead up to Operation Telic. Mike Curtis told us that Carterton School did not experience the effects of large movements of Service children, but suffered from the “trickle postings”: the small but regular flow of children in and out of the school.¹²⁵

114. Teachers told us that effective communication between the MoD and schools could help schools plan ahead for the impact of postings. Although Brigadier Brister noted that there was a “Tri-Service schools liaison policy” which set out the appropriate degree of liaison between the MoD and individual schools and LEAs, he recognised that the system was not working perfectly.¹²⁶ This view was reinforced by the Minister who described the quality of communication between the MoD and schools located near Service bases as “patchy”.¹²⁷

115. We note the difficulties that Head Teachers of schools located near Service bases have experienced owing to poor communication with the MoD about planned postings. Postings to, and away from, military bases can have a profound effect on a school's ability to budget and plan effectively. It is vital that the MoD informs schools and LEAs as early as possible about its intended postings. There is an urgent need to improve this aspect of MoD's performance.

116. Significant movements of Service Children in and out of schools located near Service bases can result directly from decisions by the MoD about the basing of units. The DfES

122 Q 162

123 Ev 109

124 *Ibid.*

125 Q 166

126 Q 216

127 *Ibid.*

funding formula should be sufficiently flexible to cope with the impact of significant numbers of Service children joining or leaving a school throughout the academic year.

Transfer of student records between LEAs

117. A recurring theme in our inquiry, raised by both parents and teachers in evidence and postings to our web forum, has been the inadequacy of procedures in place for the transfer of student records particularly from UK schools to SCE schools abroad, but also between UK schools. During our visit to Montgomery Junior School, Colchester, we heard of instances of children arriving at their new school with only their latest exercise books as a guide to their educational attainment, with formal records regarding a student's aptitude arriving weeks, or months later, if at all. We were told that the delay in transferring records could hinder a teacher's assessment of a child making a pupil's first few days more unsettled than necessary, particularly if the pupil had special needs.

118. SCE witnesses expressed dissatisfaction with the existing process for transferring student records between UK maintained schools and SCE and the quality of the information contained in them. Kathryn Forsyth told us:

the information is insufficient in terms of understanding where children are at with their learning. At the moment we are looking to devise our own records system that gives good detailed knowledge of not just whether the child has been assessed but targets for learning as well. What we rely on are parents taking records to school for us.¹²⁸

119. The Minister for Schools told us that DfES regulations required that student records should be transferred between schools within 15 days of a move being made.¹²⁹ The DfES is introducing a "common transfer file", which can be processed in paper or electronic form, and the Minister expected this to facilitate the transfer of records between schools.¹³⁰ The Minister said that the failure of schools to transfer student records within the 15 day limit should be identified in a school's Ofsted report:

The 15-day rule is set out in regulation so that it is a requirement that it be fulfilled. That would be part of Ofsted's inspection of schools and it would want to see that schools fulfilled their obligations in regulation and law.¹³¹

The Minister for Schools undertook to raise this matter with the Chief Inspector for Schools.¹³²

120. We are concerned that the records of Service children are frequently transferred between schools well beyond the 15 day requirement set by DfES regulation. In the age of e-mail and instant electronic communication, there can be no excuse for not transferring records within the 15 day regulation. Delays in the transfer of student

128 Q 280

129 Q 359

130 *Ibid.*

131 Q 361

132 Q 362

records mean that the new teacher has to take additional time to assess a child and specify suitable learning plans. In extreme cases delays could harm a child's learning development. We call on the DfES to take steps to enforce the 15 day requirement for the transfer of student records.

Pre-school provision

121. We received a submission from Nick Bennett, Naval Area Community Officer, Personal Family Service (West), highlighting the importance of pre-school provision for Service families in the UK. This argues for publicly funded pre-school buildings near Service estates.¹³³ **We recognise the importance of pre-school provision for Service families in the UK and recommend that the MoD give consideration to this.**

Experience of teaching Service children

122. Despite the many challenges involved in teaching Service children, we have been told throughout our inquiry of the many positive aspects for schools with a significant number of Service children. The positive aspects of being a Service child were referred to by Mrs Michelle Titcombe, a Service wife, who told us that her daughter “makes friends easily, she is flexible and enjoys meeting people. These are positives to her personality which I can see with a lot of Service children”.¹³⁴

123. During our visit to Montgomery Junior School, Colchester, we were told about the excellent support that the local garrison gave to the school, including sponsorship of school sports teams. They also emphasised the generally supportive nature of Service parents for school teaching staff.

Posting to our web forum: Experience of educating Service children

“Leading a school with 98% of its pupils coming from Service backgrounds is highly rewarding, never dull, mutually beneficial and always great fun.” (Head Teacher of a UK school)
--

124. **Educating Service children is often referred to in terms of the difficulties it presents and obstacles to overcome. We note that during our inquiry we have been told about many of the positive aspects of educating Service children, which for many teachers proves to be a satisfying experience.**

133 Ev 114

134 Q 123

5 Boarding schools

125. The Boarding Schools Association, which represents over 500 boarding schools in the UK, estimates there are currently 10,871 Service children at boarding school.¹³⁵ Thirty five of the BSA accredited boarding schools are state maintained, two of which are run by the MoD.

126. The evidence we have received, as well as the postings to our forum, suggest that the boarding option is frequently chosen by parents because it avoids the issues associated with high mobility between schools. Brigadier Brister told us that, when deciding the best education for their children, Service personnel faced an invidious choice:

we in the Forces have three options: our children have a disruptive education; we board; or we live apart from our families. None of those is ideal for most people.¹³⁶

127. We were told in Germany that the boarding option tended to be more popular for children of secondary school age because at that age stability was most important. This view was reinforced by Mrs Carolyn McKay who told us “the only reason my children are going to boarding school is because of the stability issue”.¹³⁷ Mrs Michelle Titcombe told us:

I want my children with me but I know that they will go to boarding school when they are older because it is the only way I can guarantee some stability of education. It is against everything I would want but I feel that would be the best option.¹³⁸

Continuity of Education Allowance

128. The MoD provides a Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA) to all eligible Service personnel who choose to educate their children at Boarding School. To be eligible, Service personnel must be on an accompanied (by partner) posting. Children must be aged between 8 and 18. 3,074 commissioned officers and 1,813 non-commissioned Service personnel claim CEA, in respect of 7,914 children.¹³⁹ In the Services as a whole, 1,492 Service personnel of Sergeant rank (or equivalent) and above claim CEA for the children’s education.¹⁴⁰ A higher proportion of RAF Senior Non-Commissioned Officers claim CEA compared with equivalent ranks in the Royal Navy, and Army.¹⁴¹ The MoD was keen to point out that it “does not endorse a twin-track approach to education and does not differentiate in any way or at any stage between the children of other ranks and the children of officers”.¹⁴²

135 Ev 100, Para 1

136 Q 295

137 Q 147

138 *Ibid.*

139 Ev 77, para 2

140 Ev 78

141 *Ibid.*

142 Ev 78, para 5

129. Postings to our forum suggest that the CEA is valued highly by those Service families who choose to take advantage of it although we received some comments that the CEA was not raised in line with the rate of inflation.

Postings to our web forum: Continuity of Education Allowance (from Service parents)

“Our children have now completed their education but this and my husband’s military career would not have been compatible without the boarding school and the allowance the MoD provide for this.”

“The CEA is failing to keep pace with increases in school fees.”

“The gap between the allowance and fees seems to widen every year.”

“The rules stipulate that parents have to pay a minimum of 10% of total fees but we end up paying 25%.”

130. The CEA is set at a rate of £4,557 for senior pupils and £3,496 for junior pupils.¹⁴³ All Service personnel are required to provide at least 10% of school fees themselves, although in practice considerably more than 10% is payable depending on the individual school fees. The CEA can be used to pay fees at an MoD-approved list of schools. Brigadier Brister told us that the CEA was not a perk of Service but rather a means by which a significant downside of Service life may be mitigated, “there are firm rules which are there to make it clear to us that this is not just an allowance to let us send our child to an independent or state boarding school, but it is there for continuity of education”.¹⁴⁴

131. While the CEA is available to all ranks we have been concerned to establish whether it is accessed by lower ranks or whether it is issued predominantly to officers. The breakdown by rank and Service shows that commissioned officers are the major users of the CEA, but that senior NCOs also make use of it. Some lower ranks make use of it but not in great numbers. Proportionately fewer of these lower ranks are of an age to have school age children themselves. The Minister for Schools suggested to us that there might be a “cultural” unwillingness to consider the boarding school option. But the requirement to pay at least 10% of fees may discourage take up among lower-paid ranks.

132. We recommend that the MoD commission research on the reasons for lower take-up of CEA among lower-paid ranks. In particular, this research should focus on any financial or cultural reasons for the lower take-up of the CEA by lower-paid ranks.

133. During our visit to Germany, we heard concerns from Service parents that the process for awarding the CEA was insufficiently flexible, making it difficult to transfer the CEA between schools if, say, a child was unhappy at a particular school. We were keen to seek assurance from the Minister that, if a sound case was made by parents, the CEA could be transferred between schools. Brigadier Brister told us:

143 Ev 68

144 Q 292

if you are dissatisfied with the school or if, for various reasons, your child is unhappy at the school, then you can put up a case to be allowed to change school and rotate the allowance.¹⁴⁵

134. MoD subsequently provided us with figures which suggested that applications by parents to transfer their CEA entitlement between schools were rare and, when they did arise, were treated sympathetically by the MoD.

In the period 12 Dec 2005–16 May 2006, [MoD] processed 27 requests for a change of Boarding School (0.34% of the number of Service children for whom Continuity of Education Allowance is paid). All of these cases were approved and the Service parents retained their entitlement to Continuity of Education Allowance.¹⁴⁶

Queen Victoria School and Duke of York's Royal Military School

135. The MoD directly manages two boarding schools for Service children: the Queen Victoria School in Dunblane, Stirlingshire (260 pupils), and the Duke of York's Royal Military School in Dover, Kent (500 pupils).¹⁴⁷ Both Schools are co-educational and provide boarding for 11 to 18 year old children of Service children.

136. The Queen Victoria School follows the Scottish curriculum, is non-selective and “has a particular duty of care for compassionate and needy cases”.¹⁴⁸ Ms Liz Cassidy told us that the Queen Victoria School was “a very supportive school with a good teacher/pupil ratio and it provides a very supportive environment for children who probably would not cope with standard alternative boarding schools”.¹⁴⁹ The school's most recent inspection judged teaching to be good and the overall quality of attainment for examination groups as very good.¹⁵⁰ The MoD also noted that the school is over-subscribed with 50% of applications rejected due to restrictions on capacity.¹⁵¹ The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence told us that the MoD had no plans to ‘disengage’ from the schools.¹⁵²

137. The Duke of York's Royal Military School is a selective co-educational boarding school, with strong academic performance including 98% of pupils attaining A–C GCSEs and 96% success at university applications.¹⁵³ Ms Liz Cassidy noted that the school had improved its educational standards a great deal over recent years and that school league tables showed that it competed successfully with “some pretty decent independent schools”.¹⁵⁴

145 Q 292

146 Ev 76, para 8

147 Ev 64

148 Ev 65

149 Q 301

150 Ev 65, para 9

151 Ev 66, para 14

152 Q 302

153 Ev 64, para 24

154 Q 301

138. The two schools have different roles but both are popular: admissions to the Queen Victoria School and the Duke of York's Royal Military School are over-subscribed. While the Queen Victoria School and the Duke of York's Royal Military School are clearly anachronisms, we see no reason to recommend any change to their status.

6 Conclusion

139. We consider it self-evident that the children of Service personnel should receive at least the same quality of schooling and educational opportunity as any child being educated in the UK. We demand much of our Service personnel, not least that they adopt a life style that is often turbulent and sometimes dangerous. In turn, Service personnel deserve assurance that their children's education will not suffer because of their parent's employment.

140. We are not convinced that the DfES and the MoD currently take the interests of Service children sufficiently into account.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. The web forum provided an opportunity for us to hear the views of, and communicate with, a broad range of people, including those based overseas. We regret that SCE staff and schools were not actively encouraged to participate from the beginning but welcome the MoD's acceptance that there is no reason why MoD employees should not contribute to fora of this kind if their purpose is to relay personal experience rather than comment on Government policy. We consider the forum to have been a valuable experience and we intend to build on this experience in future inquiries. (Paragraph 10)
2. Moving schools is stressful for all children and frequent moves can have a significant detrimental impact on young people, particularly on their willingness to form friendships with their peers. Some schools have developed imaginative ways to help students settle in to their new schools. We recommend the DfES work with the MoD to develop best practice guidance for schools on helping Service children adapt as smoothly as possible to their new school environment. (Paragraph 19)
3. We are very concerned that Service children may be falling between the responsibilities of the DfES and the devolved administrations. They must act in a joined-up way to ensure continuity of education for children moving between the different parts of the UK. This is an area which the DfES needs to address urgently. We also recommend greater contact between the MoD and those in the devolved administrations responsible for education. (Paragraph 23)
4. Mobility can negatively affect a student's educational attainment, particularly in the lead-up to key stages and GCSEs and A levels. We recommend that the DfES work closely with the MoD, SCE and devolved administrations to identify ways to mitigate the impact of mobility. (Paragraph 24)
5. The MoD and local education authorities should begin planning for the impact that the creation of Super Garrisons will have on pupil numbers in schools located near Service bases. (Paragraph 26)
6. We note the importance of regular communications between deployed Service personnel and their families. Young people can feel particular anxiety during this time and their educational attainment and general well-being can be affected. The provision of communication facilities, and the regular opportunity to use them, can help both Service personnel and their families maintain their morale during operational tours. (Paragraph 32)
7. The difficulties experienced by some Service families in getting their child assessed by an educational psychologist for Statementing purposes and the consequent delays in the provision of support to those children is unacceptable. Schools and local authorities should give the needs of Service children with Special Needs equal priority to those of any other child. (Paragraph 42)
8. We are concerned at the evidence we have received that SCE lacks sufficient numbers of educational psychologists. We call upon the MoD to ensure that SCE

schools are able to call on the services of accredited educational psychologists within a reasonable time. (Paragraph 43)

9. We recommend that the DfES and the MoD consider introducing, as a priority, a system whereby Service children with Special Needs are given a Statement of educational needs which can be taken with them as they move between schools, and is accepted by schools as the basis for support which they will provide. The Statement should be time-limited and reviewed regularly. (Paragraph 44)
10. We note the former Defence Minister's tentative suggestion of a "Statementing passport" for Service children with special needs. We recommend that the feasibility of a Statementing passport be explored further by his successor. (Paragraph 45)
11. Service parents need reliable and accessible information when making key decisions about their child's education. We note the positive feedback we received from parents who had used the Children's Education Advisory Service but also the low profile of the CEAS amongst the Service parents we met. We recommend that the MoD provide the necessary resources to raise the profile of the CEAS amongst Service families so that it can provide its important advice service to a larger number of Service parents. (Paragraph 49)
12. We believe that in today's information age, a website is an essential conduit for information between organisations and clients. We recommend that the MoD provide the CEAS with the necessary resources for an effective and visible website and that it do so speedily. (Paragraph 50)
13. While it may seem curious that the MoD should be responsible for providing schools, it is unquestionably the Department with the closest interest in the education of Service children and the issues facing them. We see no reason to call for any change in the status of SCE as an MoD agency. (Paragraph 59)
14. Both the MoD and the DfES expressed satisfaction with their current working relationship with regard to SCE schools, but saw potential for closer collaboration. We are concerned by the Minister for School's description of the DfES relationship with the MoD as "hands-off". We believe closer collaboration and a greater interest in Service children by the DfES to be essential. (Paragraph 60)
15. The written evidence we have received, and the contributions posted to our web forum, were generally positive about the quality of schooling provided by SCE schools, particularly at primary level. (Paragraph 64)
16. We are not convinced by the reasons given by the MoD for the governance arrangements for SCE schools and recommend that the MoD consider the feasibility of giving Schools Advisory Committees powers equivalent to those exercised by governing bodies in UK maintained schools. We believe that this would help to ensure that high standards of performance are achieved. In the short term, the MoD should take steps to ensure that members of Schools Advisory Committees assume a more active role in school life and that they receive appropriate training to do this effectively. (Paragraph 69)

17. We welcome the MoD's commitment to give additional funding to SCE to match increases to the DfES budget, but we are concerned to ensure that this funding is provided by HM Treasury rather than from already allocated MoD resources. We expect the Treasury to make available proportional funding to the MoD whenever it increases the schools budget. We expect the MoD to ensure that parity funding for SCE schools continues. (Paragraph 76)
18. It is vital that the interests of SCE schools are taken into account when DfES initiatives are introduced, and that SCE is resourced adequately to implement them. (Paragraph 80)
19. We recommend that the MoD consider broadening its criteria for deciding which of its contract workers are eligible for free education in SCE schools. It appears unfair that some contracted staff, performing important responsibilities for the Services, are not entitled to free schooling in SCE schools. (Paragraph 84)
20. We were surprised to discover that there does not seem to be a clear working definition of what a Service child is. Without an accepted definition, a reliable figure for the number of Service children cannot be determined and decisions about funding for Service children and the tracking of the educational attainment of Service children, is not possible. (Paragraph 88)
21. We recommend that the MoD and the DfES treat as a Service child any child of school age whose parent has served in the UK Armed Forces during that child's school career. (Paragraph 90)
22. We recognise that many LEAs do not have a significant number of Service children in their schools and would gain little benefit if the PLASC included a requirement for schools to identify Service children. For the DfES to reject the proposal on the ground that a sample focus group was not in favour is simply ridiculous, and a sad reflection of the importance which the DfES attaches to Service children. The collection of data on the number of Service children, through the national PLASC census, would bring benefit to the DfES, the MoD, SCE and LEAs. This information would assist the targeting of resources for Service children more effectively and enable trends in the attainment of Service children to be established. (Paragraph 95)
23. We do not consider its inclusion in the PLASC exercise would prove unduly burdensome for schools and the benefits it would bring are considerable. We recommend strongly that the DfES include a Service children marker in its annual PLASC exercise. (Paragraph 96)
24. All LEAs face different challenges and demands on their resources. Significant disparities in the funding needs of individual schools exist within LEAs. We believe that it is appropriate that funding decisions concerning individual schools are made at a local level, by LEAs, through its locally-determined funding formula. We commend to LEAs the example of Wiltshire County Council which provides additional funding for its schools with significant numbers of Service children. (Paragraph 102)

25. While we recognise the logistical challenge and the need for occasional unexpected postings, we recommend that the MoD adopt a more rigorous target for notice of postings. (Paragraph 105)
26. We recommend that the MoD consider how parents living abroad can be assisted better to find schools in the UK, particularly when their spouse is away on an operational deployment. (Paragraph 109)
27. We welcome the commitment by the Minister for Schools that the DfES would advise local authorities to accept unit postal addresses from which to apply to new schools. (Paragraph 110)
28. We note the difficulties that Head Teachers of schools located near Service bases have experienced owing to poor communication with the MoD about planned postings. Postings to, and away from, military bases can have a profound effect on a school's ability to budget and plan effectively. It is vital that the MoD informs schools and LEAs as early as possible about its intended postings. There is an urgent need to improve this aspect of MoD's performance. (Paragraph 115)
29. We are concerned that the records of Service children are frequently transferred between schools well beyond the 15 day requirement set by DfES regulation. In the age of e-mail and instant electronic communication, there can be no excuse for not transferring records within the 15 day regulation. Delays in the transfer of student records mean that the new teacher has to take additional time to assess a child and specify suitable learning plans. In extreme cases delays could harm a child's learning development. We call on the DfES to take steps to enforce the 15 day requirement for the transfer of student records. (Paragraph 120)
30. We recognise the importance of pre-school provision for Service families in the UK and recommend that the MoD give consideration to this. (Paragraph 121)
31. Educating Service children is often referred to in terms of the difficulties it presents and obstacles to overcome. We note that during our inquiry we have been told about many of the positive aspects of educating Service children, which for many teachers proves to be a satisfying experience. (Paragraph 124)
32. We recommend that the MoD commission research on the reasons for lower take-up of CEA among lower-paid ranks. In particular, this research should focus on any financial or cultural reasons for the lower take-up of the CEA by lower-paid ranks. (Paragraph 132)
33. The two schools have different roles but both are popular: admissions to the Queen Victoria School and the Duke of York's Royal Military School are over-subscribed. While the Queen Victoria School and the Duke of York's Royal Military School are clearly anachronisms, we see no reason to recommend any change to their status. (Paragraph 138)

Annex A: List of Abbreviations

AFF	Army Families federation
CEA	Continuity of Education Allowance
CEAS	Children's Education Advisory Service
CGS	Chief of the General Staff
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DMWS	Defence Medical Welfare Service
DSG	Dedicated Schools Grant
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GOC	General Officer Commanding
LEA	Local Education Authority
MoD	Ministry of Defence
NAAFI	Navy Army Air Force Institutes
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NPFS	Naval Personnel Family Services
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PLASC	Pupil Level Annual School Census
SAT	Standard Assessment Test
SCE	Service Children's Education
SCISS	Service Children In State Schools
SEN	Special Educational Needs
UKBC	United Kingdom Based Civilian
UKSC (G)	United Kingdom Support Group (Germany)

Annex B: Report on the Committee's web forum

The web forum ran for five weeks between 18 April and 26 May 2006 (extended from 12 May) at www.tellparliament.net/defcom

The purpose of the forum was to engage with a wide range of people interested in the education of Service children. It was a particularly useful tool for the inquiry owing to the geographical spread of Service Children's Education (SCE) schools which are based in countries around the world. The forum received postings from Service families, teachers, and young people who were attending or had attended SCE schools.

Hansard Society

The Hansard Society was commissioned to develop the website. The Society used its latest web-based initiative www.tellparliament.net as a platform for the Defence Committee's inquiry. Launched in January 2004 it creates a template and dedicated online platform to host parliamentary consultations.

The Hansard eDemocracy Programme worked on the web design and liaised with the Committee on the content and background information for the website. The forum had a clear explanation of what the inquiry was about, who was doing the consultation and for what purpose. It also provided background information and suggestions for further reading. At registration, a set of basic terms and conditions were made available, as well as a clear explanation of the forum's moderation policy.

Publicity

The web forum was publicised via a series of press notices and targeted e-mails at interest groups and individual SCE schools and UK schools located near Service garrisons. Press notices were also sent to organisations such as the DfES, Ofsted, and Local Education Authorities and Forces welfare groups, HIVEs, SCE and SCE schools around the world.

Reminder press notices and e-mails were sent regularly to these groups.

Postings and Moderation

The forum went live on 18 April 2006.

In order to contribute directly, interested parties were required to create an account. Once they had created an account, they received a username and password that allowed them to access and submit to the forum. Users were also able to read the posts and discussions without logging in.

During the course of the forum, Committee staff were responsible for 'facilitation moderation'. The Committee posted comments to facilitate discussions – asking for additional comments on an issue posted on the web pages, or introducing a new topic to move the discussion along.

Registration

176 people registered to take part in the online forum at tellparliament.net and a total of 115 messages were posted.

There were over 5,000 hits on the page.

Out of those who posted messages on the site:

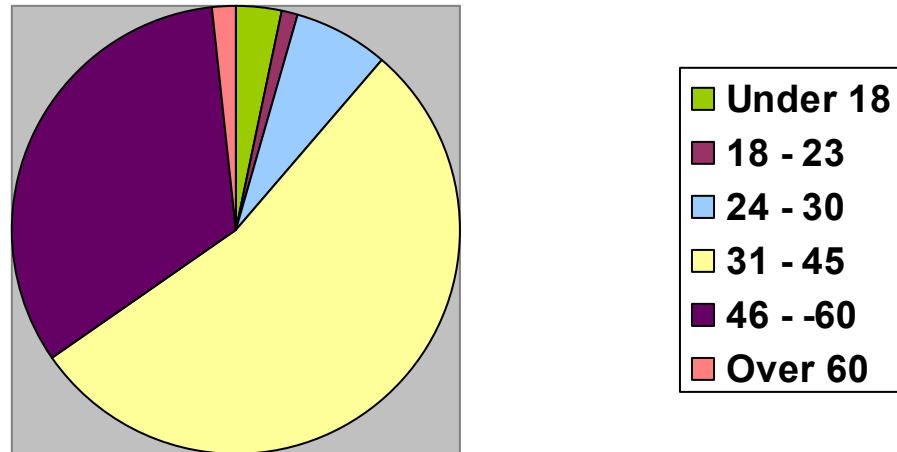
- 12 were posted on the young people page
- 61 were posted on the service families page
- 17 were posted on the teachers page
- 25 were posted on the schools page

The forum was originally due to run from 18 April to 12 May 2006. For the first few weeks, there were very few postings from SCE schools and teachers. The Chairman wrote to the Minister to seek assurance that SCE teachers had not been prevented from participating. The Minister replied stating that SCE teachers would be encouraged to participate, and the number postings to the forum did pick up albeit slightly. In order to allow time for further postings, the web forum was extended to 26 May.

Out of those who registered:

- 3.41% were under 18 years of age
- 1.14 % were 18 – 23 years old
- 6.82% were 24 – 30 years old
- 3.98% were 31 – 45 years old
- 32.95% were 46 – 60 years old
- 1.7% were over 60 years of age

Below is a graphical representation of the age groups of those who registered on the web forum:



Those who registered were asked if they had taken part in an online consultation before:

- 9.66% answered YES
- 90.34% answered NO

The Hansard Society noted a high level of interaction between contributors compared with other web forums it had facilitated.

Summary of Comments Posted

The online discussion was structured around four main headings:

- Young People
- Service Families
- Teachers
- Schools

Young People

The first two contributors who participated on the site were two sisters, who expressed unhappiness about their German school. They were the children of a contractor whose contract did not include free schooling. The family could only afford to pay for one to attend an SCE school.

'I finish the German School at 1 o'clock then I don't have anything to do because we are not part of the community. I don't know any other children..'

'Why can I go to school in England for free and I'm not allowed to in Germany? My dad looks after all the soldiers and all the children and us at home but there is no one to pay for my English school.'

'My sister is lucky she gets to go to the English school but my mum can't pay for us both. I think it's nearly 5000 euros for now until the summer holidays. I want to go to the English school and when my dad goes to Afghanistan who will make sure that we are ok? Please let me go to the English school.'

Another contributor expressed the difficulty that mobility had caused to her schooling, with the differences in the curricula followed by UK and SCE schools.

'On many occasions I have found myself in a situation where I am struggling with the work set by my teachers. This is not because I am not able, but the constant moving to and from the UK to Germany. I moved to N. Ireland just before my Y9 SATs to find that none of the schools did the same examining board I was taking in the previous school, meaning I had to learn whole new syllabus for three lessons. [...] In year 10 I moved from N. Ireland back to Germany and guess what? The examining boards were different and none of the classes I chose were available other than Geography to me. [...] Some children aren't as able as others in school and would not be able to catch up with the work...'

The contributor also mentioned the challenges facing children adapting to life overseas, while another emphasised the importance of understanding children's needs in order to improve their experiences.

'[...]some people find it hard to meet new people. These people fade into the background and keep to themselves and be given the title of loner. Some people react to this and talk to them, but others often bully these people. I have seen cases like this everywhere I have moved!!!'

'I'm coming to the end of my PhD in which I have looked at the experiences of education of army children. In my research, it has become clear that there is a vast difference between the perceptions of army students and their teachers/policy makers. The army students I interviewed all mentioned their feelings of sadness when moving and leaving friends, whereas teachers and policy makers were most concerned about missing records/funding. It strikes me that there needs to be more understanding about what matters to the children involved – by looking at their needs, we might be able to make their experiences better.'

Finally, one contributor expressed his thoughts on boarding school:

'I first went to a boarding school at the age of 11, now at 16 I can say that compared to all other schools I recently attended, this one is most definitely the best. Without the funding of the Services, this would not have been possible. My dad currently serves in the Royal Navy - this gave myself and my three younger sisters a chance to a better education. The boarding school I am at now is excellent. Before I went there 5 years ago, I hated going to school, but now I think that one of the best parts of the day is the education! [...] I personally think that boarding schools are the best of education a child/young person could receive, it is truly amazing.'

Service Families

Many postings had favourable comments about SCE schooling and its importance within the military communities. In particular, contributors highlighted how SCE schools recognise the particular social and emotional demands placed upon service children.

'I was the GOC in Germany from 2001 to 2003 [...] My considerable background there taught me that the schools are the backbone of our communities, often providing the focus of community spirit, especially in the smaller stations, and usually with continuity of knowledge from the past. During Op Telic, almost the only people with experience of family care and reassurance of children, derived from the first Gulf War, were to be found in the ranks of the headteachers and senior staff of the schools. For those with children of school age, satisfaction with schooling is by far the most important factor in family service in Germany, so it is worth getting it as good as possible.'

'Our daughters are in their second year at Marlborough School in Osnabruk. I have nothing but praise for the Ofsted recognised outstanding school. The cohort of pupils is of course a rich mix of ability but every child's capabilities seem to be assessed and harnessed. Class sizes are the envy of my UK based peers.'

'SCE have always demonstrated in very practical terms that they are alert to the academic needs of my children but just as importantly that, they recognised the particular social and emotional demands placed upon service children. Each class teacher, following the example of their Headteacher, has shown they regard each child's situation as unique and further that the relationship between parents, teachers and children is a partnership for the benefit of the child, in and out of schools.'

'Whilst 4Bde were in Iraq on Telic, Marlborough School [...] offered huge understanding of and support for the situation the majority of children were experiencing with a parent away for 6 months. Initiatives also allowed for the experience of those children whose Daddy wasn't away and didn't want to be made to feel difference. OFSTED acknowledged the role of the school as the focal point of stability for children during this period.'

However, concerns were expressed about how complaints from parents were dealt with by SCE and the lack of support parents encountered when making formal complaints.

'Parents are not made aware of the next step if they wish to take a complaint further or have faith that it will be dealt with sympathetically. Parents also believe they may be compromising the military career prospects and indeed their employment, if they 'make a fuss' and pursue a point. The schools do this, the threat of 'the green machine', to their advantage.'

'I would like to see an independent body responsible for dealing with complaints about service children's schools. A body which has no interference from the military, SCE or the schools themselves. This could be an organisation run in the UK made available for dealing with complaints towards any school attended by service children whether it is overseas or in the UK.'

'One of the problems I have encountered is with making a complaint. On two occasions I have had reason to complain but each time I have been brushed off with a patronising

comment from teachers. An independent body should be available to discuss issues in a non threatening environment to keep the relationship between teachers and parent impartial.'

'I thoroughly agree with the other contributors that there should be a proper system to complain where you are not satisfied with the Headmaster's decision. Recently I had reason to disagree with the headmaster, over a certain teacher. I had a meeting with him and the issue was not resolved. I then put my complaint in writing and delivered a copy to both the headmaster and the head of SCE in Wegburg. Two months later I still haven't had a reply!'

Several participants commented on the problem of bullying that exists in some schools.

'I have had an experience where my child was being bullied, ended up with a black eye, but was excluded along with the bully for retaliating.'

'[...] this is not an issue that is limited to SCE schools but as I have worked in the SCE secondary school for twenty years, eighteen in a pastoral role, I have some experience in the field.'

'When my child was bullied [...] and I eventually managed to speak to his form tutor the teacher told me that he had an idea of what was happening due to the fact that he had days where he thought if he pretended not to be in school, no one would notice he was there and often hid himself away.'

Contributors highlighted the disruption that the timing of postings create to a student's education, particularly during GCSE and A-level years.

'It is apparent that there is no communication regarding possible postings between the people responsible for postings (MCM Div) and the soldier. Forethought should be given for children when a posting is within the GCSE and AS/A Level years. If such a course has started, it should be policy that the soldier is only posted within the school catchment, ie garrison.bde area. [...] Both my children have suffered by postings within GCSE and A Level courses, one is a whole year behind their peers.'

'Postings mid-year play havoc with family life. We moved within the UK during March and could not get a pre-school place for our rising 4 yr old, nor a Reception year place for her the following September in the good local school (top of the league table)[...]To ensure we had a place and to get high quality schooling, we decided to go private.'

'The problems facing children in the UK schools does not only affect those returning to the UK from an overseas posting. The same applies to all service children whose parent is posted after the normal cut off date for school entry.'

The MOD needs to work alongside the Ministry for Education to ensure that all Service Children have the same rights as every other child.

Parental choice has made a situation where children with stable lives are able to attend the best schools, leaving more 'mobile' children with no choice of school - and more often than not, the school that no other parent wants for their child.'

Many contributed to the discussion on postings, highlighting the impact that delay in the notice of quarter allocation can cause in finding schools back in the UK.

'Military families suffer two ways in the schools lottery on postings in the UK.

- a) we have no choice on address, so no choice in catchment school.*
- b) if the catchment school is unsuitable we have no other choices because we have too short notice to apply to out of catchment schools or have missed appeal dates.'*

'I am a Service father of 3 children who is deploying to Portugal with my family. I know that when I return to the UK in two and half years time (Sep '08)- I will not be allocated an address in enough time to be allocated a school place at a school of our choice i.e in our catchment area. The closing dates are usually around January - I will be lucky enough to have an appointment at this time, let alone an address. This is a worry.'

'Service children's education (be it returning from abroad or moving within the UK) is a huge issue for service families, especially if they choose to have their children educated in the state sector. [...] The government policy of parental choice has obviously impacted on Service children's education as schools appear to have no obligation to provide places for children in their catchment area if they are full – the class limit for Key Stage 1 is 30. Also, why should a school forgo the pro rata money from a pupil to hold a certain number of school places for RAF personnel?'

'The allocation system works on the fact that you have to be able to attend the school to accept the place, so military children are constantly gazumped from school places that are available, but not when they are able to take them - it's the 'allocation of places' system that discriminates against service families.'

'The problem with finding the next school, especially back in the UK, lies not just in how much notice of posting is given but notice of quarter allocation. This issue is raised again and again by the AFF and at the CGS briefing team forums but the bottom line is that addresses are often unavailable until 28 days before the move and that of course impacts on catchment areas, finding schools and the availability of places. [...] In the UK there isn't that awareness of our situation or the flexibility.'

One participant stated that the centralised allocation system had affected the dialogue between local Customer Care Officers and Service families:

'Under the old system of quarter allocation, which was done at a very local level, the Customer Care Officer was usually well aware of the problems facing Service families trying to obtain a school place on their patch. In the past I have been allocated three 'ghost' quarters by CCOs so that I could apply to the local school and get a place for my child (which you can only do if you have an address). It didn't matter that when we finally got given our quarter that the address was slightly different so long as it was in the same catchment area. However with the new centralised allocation procedures, area CCOs won't have the flexibility to do this, which leaves Service families with even fewer options.'

Several contributors looked at ways in which the situation could be improved, with suggestions ranging from postings being decided further in advance, to places 'being kept' for the children of military personnel.

'1) Postings need to be decided at least a year in advance to allow families to plan their children's education.

2) *The DfES must work alongside the posting desks to ensure that addresses can be provided to the families in order for school applications to be made.*

3) *A more stable family life for Service men and women could be considered.*

4) *If none of the above can be achieved, then perhaps the Government should fund school and nursery places for all Service children, not just those wishing to opt for boarding schools.'*

'Why can't legislation allow for 'military' places to be held at schools to allow one or two places a year to be reserved for military children who will be moving mid-year or at short notice to give military children a chance to get into a good schools?

Or to allow 'military postings' to be a valid reason for an appeal?

Everyone wants a good school for their children, we just don't get a fair chance to find one.'

'The admissions policy for a school local to a quarter area should allocate a fixed number of places which should be kept 'free' for service children . This would mean if one service child moved away there would be a place available to someone moving in rather than to a local child. This would mean our children are not disadvantaged by the fact they cannot get their names on waiting lists.'

One contributor commented on the need for schools with service children regularly transferring in to have additional funding.

'I would like to say that schools who have service children transferring regularly into them deserve extra funding. This could be used in the following ways:

1. *To assess the children as they arrive so any gaps in building blocks can be found quickly, (this is often the case if a child has moved often in the first few years of school)*
2. *To then be able to give the children the necessary input to fill these gaps*
3. *To enable an induction programme into the school to help with the friendship groups etc.'*

Following the Chairman's posting, many contributors replied to his question, 'How attractive is the Boarding School option?' As the contributors stated, the boarding school option is a hard decision for families and not lightly taken.

'Service life for career soldiers means that when your children get to a certain age 'crunch time' you have three choices as to how you are going to see them through senior school:

- a) *choose to stay in your own home and use the local schools so your spouse serves unaccompanied - the down side is that you will be separated from your spouse*
- b) *take pot luck whilst moving around - usually the older your children get the fewer school choices there are (usually only the 'worst' schools have places as the 'best' schools have been cherry picked by people living in the area*
- c) *Boarding School. Great education but it will cost a lot and although your children benefit in many ways they don't see much of their family.'*

'I feel Mr James Arbuthnot MP has used the wrong word here-it certainly isn't attractive having to send my children to boarding school to ensure they have a stable education. [...] We could have chosen a 'cheaper' school, but after 3 years of investigations and visits, decided it was best to choose one close to family and friends, so at least our daughters had someone they knew close by, as they could not have their parents.'

'We lived in countries with different systems of education (Brunei, Kuwait, USA and UK) and frequently moved at critical stages of education – we moved 7 times during the critical exam periods (14 – 18 years old). My personal choice is to live with my husband; for us family stability is my husband and I living in the same place when possible - there are often extended periods of separation due to deployments that prohibit this. Boarding school was not always the easiest option – leaving a little boy in England whilst we went to Hong Kong was heart breaking but was the advice given by educational psychiatrists.'

The importance of good pastoral care was highlighted, essential to making the experience of boarding school a positive one for children.

'We found a school with good pastoral care and where boarding is central to the ethos of the school. I feel this is necessary to make the boarding school experience a positive one for the family... Unfortunately you have to pay over the Boarding School Allowance to find a school that meets these requirements. A state school, with a boarding house, which is the cheapest option, does not have the funding and the staff to put on the activities a private school can.'

Many postings concentrated on the issue of the Boarding School allowance, with many considering it too low, with a widening gap between the Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA) and the cost of Boarding school fees.

'The Continuity of Education allowance/Boarding school allowance is every year failing to increase to keep pace with the fee increases being imposed by Private Schools. My daughters' school today informed us that the fees per child will increase by £500 from September. The Committee should look at the mechanism for increasing the allowance as many parents board their children not through choice but primarily to secure a stable education—my eldest daughter is 9 and next term will start her 5th school!'

'I do think the rates of CEA need to be kept more in line with the increases in school fees. The rules stipulate that parents have to pay a minimum of 10% of the total fees but in reality we end up paying around 25%. When the rates are calculated they basically average out the most popular Service boarding schools and then abate the year group figures by 25% to set the rates of CEA. It would be interesting to know why this is set at 25%, instead of 10% to match the parental contribution.'

'As a single Father of 2 and Serving member of the Armed Forces I was in the position of paying nearly £5,000 per year to keep my children in school, even now I find myself paying out over £800 per term just for my daughter. When they started to board the fees came to £1,500 per term per child. It seems a combination of the school increasing their fees disproportionately and fees increasing slowly has led to this gap. [...] I believe schools accepting service boarders, and they do this with open arms believe me, should have some financial limits placed on their fee increases, the MOD do after all plough a lot of money into this sector'

‘The gap between the cost of having a child at boarding school and the allowance (CEA) is wide and increasing—boarding school is an expensive option and that is before all the extra costs are considered.’

‘We did not take the boarding school option lightly and were particularly concerned about the long term costs. I now pay up to £800+ a term for each child on top of the allowance. This figure rises each year as the allowance clearly has not risen in line with the rise in fees of the private schools. [...] I find year on year that the gap gets bigger. [...] Given the jump in fees once the child enters the 6th form the gap become even bigger. The 10% contribution of the parent is clearly a joke; I am paying 20-25%. The structure of rates for the CEA together with the manner in which it is adjusted annually really does need to be addressed.’

Some participants stated that due to the educational needs of their children, many spouses felt they had no choice but to live apart so that the children could remain in the same local school for their education.

‘Our decision was that my wife and daughters would remain in the area of the country we were in at the time (Lincolnshire) and I would go wherever the RAF sent me. In practice, of the last 4 postings I have been able to travel daily to work for 2 of those tours. For the other jobs I became a weekly commuter, returning home for weekends/leave. The latter situation was far from ideal, and placed a different burden on my wife and daughters. [...] I have not pursued appointments that would have contributed to my career prospects because of the location of such jobs. Moreover, I have concluded that if the only available future appointments meant becoming a weekly commuter again, I would probably leave the Service rather than accept such disruption to my family life.’

‘I am concerned that my son will have to move from Germany in August to start a placement at North Devon College in the September. Point 1 being that he could not continue into 6th year due to my husband’s draft not finishing until February 2007, which would mean he would have to leave school mid-year and try to gain a place in a UK mainstream school. This is hard enough at the best of time but during exam years it is NOT feasible. [...] And secondly either I have to accompany my son home and try and gain a surplus married quarter so he can attend college which invariably means that my husband and myself are put into a forced separation due to educational needs...Point 2 being that there is no provision for right of entitlement for a quarter due to moving for educational reasons, I am not the only parent who is faced with this dilemma and I feel that it should be addressed.’

It was suggested that the Government should fund school and nursery places for all Service children, and not just those wishing to opt for boarding school.

‘It would be very useful to have the choice of [...] partially funded private day school.’

‘If on returning to the UK, a service family is unable to gain places for their children at the same school, could MoD not fund their places at a local private school?’

‘If the money went with the child, in the same way that the Health Service is offering Health Care in a hospital of the patient’s choice, then Service children could opt for the school of their choice – be it state or private.’

Some postings were critical of the support that parents receive from Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in the UK.

‘When a problem did arise (our son was bullied by a fellow pupil) we found the school completely unable to cope with the issue compounded by our son's distress at his father's absence. [...] We contacted NPFS, who were excellent and offered enormous support during an extremely stressful period, attending meetings at school etc. Eventually the issue was resolved, however, it really highlighted the unique difficulties service children experience in comparison to mainstream pupils and this is often completely overlooked despite promises to the contrary.’

‘I have just entered into the school experience and have been disappointed that service families are treated less favourably because of their particular circumstances which not of their own making. There is little you can do when faced with a lack of address even if you are able to have some idea of a new posting. This means that you are often a late applicant and therefore have to get what everyone else chooses not to take up. [...] Families do their best to support their children within the service life. However, service children also deserve to have more support from the education system.’

The posting below highlighted the problems caused by different cut-off dates for admissions.

‘When posted into Northern Ireland, parents need to be aware that 1st July is the last date in the academic year, and therefore the cut-off date for admission into year groups. Service children with birthdays in July/August are often then put into a year below that which they would be in on the mainland. With the frequent moves that disrupt education in the first place, this then causes another lack of continuity in education.’

Two postings highlighted the fact that the children of SCE teachers were not entitled to student loans on the grounds that they did not live in the UK, even though SCE teachers paid UK taxes and had the status of UK-based civilian. This issue was also raised on the Teachers web page.

‘My eldest son has been refused a student loan on the grounds that he does not live in UK, despite the fact that I pay UK tax and NI, and have the title of UK-based civilian. The children of Service personnel are automatically entitled to higher education funding, but SCE teachers own children are not. This is, I think, unjust, and discriminates against our children's access to higher and further education.’

‘I am a contractor based in Germany and have concerns about my children's education post 16. [...] Should my children wish to go to university they will not be entitled to student loans. This will prove a real barrier, and is an issue which needs addressing, especially with the cuts to allowances (and payment for accommodation) which contractors are faced with.’

A couple of postings looked at the issue of Internet-based schooling, and commented that it should be a recognised and supported option.

‘She is now educated at home over the Internet at my expense. It appears that this is not an isolated case and that several others at Ramstein have expressed concern regarding the school and have chosen other options for secondary education (internet, UK boarding, or local

German School). SCE have repeatedly stated that they will not fund Internet-based home education and my daughter's German is not strong enough for her to be educated in a foreign language.'

'I decided on home education via a UK based Internet school (InterHigh) – a choice that others at Ramstein have subsequently followed. SCE have repeatedly stated that they will not fund internet-based home education and consequently, I am having to pay for my daughters' education entirely out of my own pocket.'

Teachers

Participants on the Teachers web page commented on the high standard of education in SCE schools.

'It is my impression that SCE provides an education that is better than the 'English' average. This is reflected in our results and through external reports such as Ofsted. Despite being outside the UK mainstream our schools are up to date when it comes to current UK practice and indeed the resourcing we enjoy, alongside the smaller class sizes than UK, means our students get a very good education. As one recently arrived colleague who has his own school age children said to me, we offer a 'public school' education in a state sector setting.'

'I would like to say the majority of teachers I have spoken to enjoy working in well resourced schools that provide a top quality education in many different geographical locations.'

Participants noted that teachers in SCE schools faced unique challenges, such as the fact that postings occurred at the most inconvenient times for children, and they had to cope with the emotional stresses affecting children when one parent was on deployment in an operational area.

'The average 11 year old at my school has been to 4.3 schools. The average stay is just 5 terms.'

'Our teachers face challenges that are different to those in England. People have commented on the turbulence of our students, the fact that posting changes often occur at the most inconvenient times for our students...Also our teachers have to cope with the emotional stresses affecting children when one parent is serving in an operational area whose dangers are brought home to them each evening thanks to the availability of 24 hour TV news. Again through hard work in school as well as support from central services provided by the Agency these complex issues are addressed.'

'The issues raised through mobility are many and complex at pupil, parent, school and teacher levels. For children, the social and emotional issues vary considerably; some appear to cope and show little sign of trauma when leaving or joining the school, whilst others are noticeably affected. Interestingly, it is not just the children who leave the school who show signs of distress, often it is the friends who are left behind who have lost someone they really care for.'

'Does the mobility of Service children cause particular issues? In my view, turbulence (moving schools) CAN have a detrimental effect on basic skills that need best be learned in the primary stage i.e. literacy and numeracy, but the truth is we don't REALLY know. Until relatively recently there was little general agreement of how to measure progress. The much

derided SAT's are giving us tools to assess progress and diagnose areas of weakness but that still leaves open the question of what to do about it.'

Many participants felt that SCE schools coped well in dealing with the effects of mobility, and in preparing and supporting children through the process of moving schools.

'While there are clearly different issues facing service children with mobility and with parents being deployed to dangerous parts of the world there are also many similarities. SCE schools help children cope well with stress and meet the challenges well.'

'SCE deals with mobility well in terms of academic achievement in the primary years. This is well demonstrated by performance at KS2 National Curriculum Tests. The very good provision in the foundation stage contributes to this performance.'

Some contributors did however highlight the specific needs of children with Special Educational Needs, which had to be taken into account when dealing with the issue of mobility.

'Preparing and supporting children through this delicate period is therefore essential and time consuming if pupils are to be able to enjoy and achieve. For children with Special Educational Needs this is particularly the case.'

'Issues over special educational needs, in particular with emotional and behavioural needs are probably harder to deal with since there is less support than there would be in the maintained sector in UK.'

Particular issues caused by moving schools are the difficulties caused by the differences in curricula – not only between between UK and SCE schools, but also the differences in curricula between home nations.

'Having moved to and from Northern Ireland and with a child whose birthday is in August I can confirm that the different cut off dates within the two education systems IS a problem. When we were in Northern Ireland our son was put in the class below the class he was put in on our return to England. This had obvious consequences for his educational development.'

'The difference between the Scottish and SCE systems did cause problems both in terms of syllabuses followed but also in more basic issues such as which year should a student be placed. The system in Scotland is so different than that in SCE the arrival of a battalion previously stationed in Scotland was quite challenging. A different start time to the school year meant some students were in the wrong year group compared to their English system colleagues [...] If whole battalion moves are to continue between Scots based units and areas where the education is provided by SCE schools then issues like this need to be addressed in the interests of the children.'

'At curriculum level, teachers frequently comment on the different experiences and approaches to learning that children bring with them from previous schools. Particularly for children arriving from Scotland, Ireland and Wales, the lack of ability to work independently and make their own decisions is a frequent concern when adjusting to the demands of the National Curriculum.'

Some suggestions were put forward as to how issues caused by mobility could be reduced – with, for example, no movement during exam courses or timing major battalion moves so that they had less affect on schools and children.

‘Children suffer if they have to move during an exam course. [...] Not all your correspondents seem to be aware that once the second year of a two year exam course has begun, the family have an entitlement to stay in quarter and therefore at the same school until the exam is done, even if this means Mum staying to see the child through while Dad goes off to his new posting. Not an ideal solution but better than no support at all.’

‘The biggest single impact on standards and children's family lives would be to try to make all major battalion moves happen through the summer holiday and/or less often. Mid year diruptions are the hardest to the school, the incoming children and those children not affected by the move who are already settled in class. [...] Service children are wonderful and have great personality and enthusiasm. They do cope with change well on the outside but the older they get the more they are affected by loss of friendships. Again for those left behind it can be equally upsetting.’

There were several postings on the web page regarding the transfer of children’s records as they moved from school to school. It was felt that children often arrived at new schools with insufficient records, and that much improvement was needed in this area.

‘In my twenty years teaching for SCE, 18 were spent inducting new children in to the school. Information generally fell into two classes: other SCE schools (excellent transfer of information) and UK schools (non-existent information). The most common comment made by parents moving to Germany from the UK was “The school said they were too busy to give us any information but something will follow in the post” but of course it hardly ever did.’

‘It never ceases to amaze me, the number of children with SEN who appear to have 'lost' their SENs en route from their previous school, only after a call to their last school to confirm our initial assessments does the level of support previously given to a child become clear. This is an area where improved school to school liaison would enable us to prepare for needy newcomers more quickly.’

‘In my experience, it has always been a little difficult gaining the required records for children who have Special Educational Needs and a greater deal of consistency needs to be applied in this area. It is particularly helpful if records are posted directly to the new school and not necessarily given to parents to pass on themselves. [...] When transfer between schools works well, it involves as much notification to receiving schools as possible and in the case of children with SEN, as much information as can reasonably be provided to ensure transfer is smooth and the child's needs are met quickly.’

Many contributions discussed the financial management of SCE schools; although matters had started to improve, there was still work to be done in this area.

‘Now working for a LEA, I believe that there are areas that SCE could improve upon such as financial management for the schools with more delegation and less centralised control. Some form of carry forward from financial year to financial year would lead to less waste. Fewer headquarters staff and more delegation of responsibilities would also help to make this more

efficient. A closer liaison with a UK LEA would ensure that staff such as Inspection/advisory staff were kept up-to-date.'

'[...] things have begun to change for the better; since April 05, secondary and middle schools have had fully delegated funding and a group of 4 primary schools are trialling this during 06/07, in anticipation of primary heads deciding whether to go down this route or not from April '07. SCE has tried hard to convince MOD that we need financial 'roll over' but the MOD cannot/will not change their rules. SCE has looked at how we can successfully work round this; planned and agreed overspend/underspend is being supported where possible, to try and alleviate the problem of annuality. There is no doubt that staff at HQ SCE are trying to ensure that there is transparency in their financial management and are involving head teachers in decisions regarding funding, mirroring UK practice where possible - but we aren't the same!'

As on the Service Families web page, the issue of higher education funding for the children of SCE teachers was raised.

'I am a teacher employed by SCE serving in Germany. I am, of course, a UK tax and NI payer because of my UK-based status. My son was however refused a student loan on the grounds that I am not resident in UK. This is inequitable: the children of Service (ie. Army, Navy, RAF) personnel do qualify for student loans wherever in the world they live, but the children of the UK-based civilians working for MOD do not. The cost of fully funding a child through university is punitive, and is in no way recompensed by the Cost of Living Allowance.'

Schools

As on the Young People web page, the absence of schooling in the contracts of UK based civilians was raised. David Crausby MP also received replies to his question, addressing the fairness, or lack, of different levels of provision to the children of officers, other ranks and contractors.

'I would really like to know why the MOD will not put schooling into my husbands firms contract. We are entitled to everything else apart from the schooling...I have just paid 4,762. euros for the eldest to attend an SCE school from the 24th April till the end of July. That works out roughly at £60.00 a day! My husband only earns about £70.00 a day. The DMWS is a charity organisation to help soldiers and their families, and my husband with 27 years in the Army is very good at his job.'

'Why is it that DMWS are not entitled to schooling when they are providing a valuable service and are deployabel and regularly posted. [...] We understand that the MOD pays for the schooling of service children but maybe government needs to look into providing civilian support staff with a grant from the Education budget to enable us to give our children a sound British Education.'

'[...] whilst there are contractors working for the MOD on high wages who could probably afford the cost of education for SCE or who have this included in their 'package', I feel that contractors' on low wages, working for non-profit making charities who (as I have previously mentioned) are posted regularly and deployed with the Army are an exception to the rule and should have education included in their contract.. At present some people with families working as UKBCs are discriminated against due to the lack of free schooling. [...] Surely the

fact that DMWS are deployable strengthens the case for the MOD to provide free schooling for families of DMWS Welfare Officers.'

'I am an 'entitled but paying' contractor from a charity/non profit making organisation where schooling with the SCE is concerned. When we come to work here in Germany we give up the free schooling we receive for our children in the UK... To pay for my child to go to school with SCE is costing me around 55% of my income. Should the other child insist on going to the same school, or have problems I would have to take up a second job in Germany so as to pay the fees and feed my family!'

'I have asked SCE what is taken into account when the school fees are set for fee paying parents of contractors children. The answers that I received from different sources were to me unsatisfactory. From what I have been told I have worked out for myself that the fees are set, so as to deter local ex patriates who are here in business or well paid jobs from flooding the schools with their children. There are after all a lot of ex patriates in Germany. I believe that SCE who are after all themselves UKBCs should set different rates for UKBCs who have to pay and these ex-patriates. [...] I think if the system cannot be fair and allow people like me, free schooling while I am here supporting the services, that SCE should set a fair and manageable rate for entitled UKBCs and another for Ex Patriates who wish to send their children to SCE school and can afford it.'

As on the Teachers web page, the issue of the transfer of children's records was raised. It was felt that generally there was good communication concerning childrens records between SCE schools; however the transfer of information on posting from UK schools was generally poor.

'To summarise, we experience good two way communications with other SCE schools. The transfer of information on posting from UK schools is generally poor although better in areas where there is a significant MoD presence.'

One user commented on the fact that support for children with special needs in SCE schools needs a great deal of improvement in terms of funding and staff commitment

'I am a civilian working alongside service personnel. I do believe that support for children with special needs warrants a lot of improvement in the terms of funding and staff commitment. I have a child with some special needs and SCE schools should be given the resources to allow similar support for children with special needs like British state schools.'

Several commentators looked at the timing of postings, and how they affected childrens education, with one user stating that moves for family personnel should be reduced in order to minimise the impact.

'I pushed my unit to keep me in the same unit or move me to a unit within the Rinteln catchment area, for my daughters last two years education. Unfortunately they moved me when she had completed 6 months of her options. On arrival to Northern Ireland she has had to drop 3 exams due to class sizes or the School not doing her options. I think this is wrong.'

'My husband (RAF), his 15 year-old son and I were recently posted to Italy. There are two good schools nearby that accept teens but they both teach the American system not a UK curriculum or the International Baccalaureate. The issue we have is that our posting is for

the standard 3 years but it takes 4 years to complete the American High School Diploma so we are due to leave 6 months before graduation. [...] Therefore we will have to apply to extend our tour here in order for our son to graduate. However, I was told by CEAS there is no guarantee that we would be allowed to extend on these grounds, even if it means a child will have wasted years of expensive education by leaving before their qualification is attained.'

'I think the question I would like to ask as an ex service child is it really necessary to move us so often?? I had 18 postings during my school years. I have heard of postings lasting as little as six weeks? Is there no other way? In terms of this affecting / impacting schools/ schooling clearly it does. At the age of 7 I still needed my parents! I probably did until I was at least 14! Did we really need to move so much?'

LEAs were criticised by some participants; comments were made criticising the inflexibility of LEAs with their policy on the allocation of school places, and it was felt that LEAs needed to better recognise and accommodate the needs of military families.

'[...]I cannot put my daughter's name down for a school without an address. DfES will not give me an address until our turn for allocation is up. Having contacted the schools in the area we think we will be housed in, the majority of them are full with big waiting lists. Those that are not full, cannot accept our details without a) an address or b) a confirmed date (our move is scheduled for August when the schools will be closed). Any places available now cannot be kept open for my daughter as we don't move until the summer, when my husband returns from Afghanistan. [...] Can the process for housing/schools not be made easier/quicker/less stressful for service families?'

'DfES should issue addresses earlier (The AFF have campaigned for long enough!)and surely schools within military catchment areas must be aware of, and try to be sympathetic to, the needs of our mobile population, it's the LEAs that seem to be inflexible with their allocation of school places policy.'

'[...] once you do have an address you find that the better schools are of course full. [...] Whilst recognising that civilian families may also struggle to get their first choice of school, we feel that we will always be left with the worst schools because of our moves with the military. We are simply not prepared to allow our moves to disadvantage our children in this way so we are currently paying for private school. Something that we never intended to do at primary level. Unless the LEAs can recognise and better accommodate our needs we believe that financial assistance should be available so that our ability to have decent choices for our children is addressed.'

As raised on the Service Families web page, it was stated that there needed to be an independent body to deal with complaints regarding SCE schools.

'I too would like an Independent body set up who would have the responsibility for dealing with complaints and problems parents have with SCE schools. [...] An impartial body would help us to deal with problems that we feel the school is neither willing nor able to understand. Our children are fearful. If I tell them I will go in to school and sort out the problem, they comment that it will make it worse or our letter will be read out in front of the whole class, giving the children that do bully even more of a reason to pick on our children...'

This question was put by one user: ‘Why do SCE not provide extended child-care facilities as is being trialled in many areas of UK?’

‘In Osnabrück the pre-school provision is offered to all children from the start of the term after they turn 3. This means that some children can have nearly 2 years of pre-school education. Whilst it is optional I know of no parent who hasn’t opted in at the earliest opportunity! [...] In response to parental pressure at least 2 of the pre-schools are about to offer the option of extended hours, until 1415, twice a week. Parents will pay circa 10 euros per session. It’s a requirement driven by the shortage of childcare in the garrison, recognised by GOC UKSC(G), and is being widely welcomed.

Having compared notes with UK colleagues and friends I am in no doubt that we are very well served both in the quality, standards and availability of our pre-school provision which I believe is well above the government target.’

Formal minutes

Tuesday 11 July 2006

Members present:

Mr James Arbuthnot, in the Chair

Mr David S Borrow
Mr David Crausby
Mr David Hamilton
Mr Mike Hancock
Mr Dai Havard

Mr Adam Holloway
Mr Brian Jenkins
Mr Kevan Jones
Mr Mark Lancaster

Educating Service Children

The Committee considered this matter.

Draft Report (Educating Service Children), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the Chairman's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 140 read and agreed to.

Annexes [Summary, list of abbreviations and report on the Committee's web forum] agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Eleventh Report of the Committee to the House.

Several papers were ordered to be appended to the Minutes of Evidence.

Ordered, That the Appendices to the Minutes of Evidence taken before the Committee be reported to the House.

Several papers were ordered to be reported to the House.

Ordered, That the provisions of Standing Order No. 134 (select committee (reports)) be applied to the Report.

Ordered, That the Chairman do make the report to the House.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 19 July at half past Eleven o'clock.]

List of witnesses

Monday 24 April 2006

Amber Martin, Kelly Saunders, Sheree Hart, Chris Horseman, Lucy Fawcett and David Pym, students from Alderman Blaxill Secondary School, Colchester Ev 1

Mrs Rachel Troughton, Army Families Federation, **Mrs Chris Cooper, Mr John Prosser, Mrs Heather Wheeler, Mrs Michelle Titcombe, Mrs Sharon Watson, Mrs Carolyn Mackay, Mrs Michelle Dunn, Mrs Maria Barber-Riley and Mr Anthony Evans**, parents of Service children Ev 7

Mr Mike Curtis, Head Teacher of Carterton School, Oxfordshire, **Ms Tina Evans**, Head Teacher, Zouch Primary School, Wiltshire, **Mr Paul Ranson**, Deputy Head Teacher, Alderman Blaxill School, Colchester, Essex, and **Mr Derek Jones**, Assistant Head Teacher, Alderman Blaxill School, Colchester, Essex Ev 16

Tuesday 2 May 2006

Mr Don Touhig MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence, **Brigadier Anthony Brister**, Director, Educational and Training Services (Army), **Ms Liz Cassidy**, Command Secretary, Adjutant General, **Mr David Wadsworth**, Chief Executive of Service Children's Education, and **Ms Kathryn Forsyth**, Assistant Chief Executive, School Effectiveness, Service Children's Education, Ministry of Defence Ev 23

Tuesday 13 June 2006

Jim Knight MP, Minister of State for Schools, and **Ms Sue Garner**, Head of the School Admissions and Class Size Unit, Department for Education and Skills Ev 41

List of written evidence

1	Army Families Federation	Ev 53
2	Mike Curtis	Ev 56
3	Ministry of Defence	Ev 58
4	Second memorandum from the Ministry of Defence	Ev 73
5	Letter from the Chairman to Mr Don Touhig MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence	Ev 76
6	Letter from Mr Tom Watson MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence	Ev 77
7	Third memorandum from the Ministry of Defence	Ev 77
8	Fourth memorandum from the Ministry of Defence	Ev 78
9	Department for Education and Skills	Ev 79
10	Captain Terry Ring	Ev 85
11	Mrs J P Urquhart	Ev 86
12	Joanne Jones	Ev 86
13	Ofsted	Ev 86
14	National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers	Ev 88
15	Association of School and College Leaders	Ev 90
16	Sean Burke	Ev 91
17	Lynne Sutton	Ev 91
18	Confederation of Children's Service Managers	Ev 92
19	Jacque Voase	Ev 95
20	Department for Children and Education, Wiltshire County Council	Ev 96
21	Second memorandum from the Department for Children and Education, Wiltshire County Council	Ev 96
22	National Association of Head Teachers	Ev 98
23	Governors of Bulford Church of England School	Ev 99
24	Boarding Schools Association	Ev 100
25	Barry Ashworth	Ev 101
26	State Boarding Schools Association	Ev 101
27	Clarendon Junior School	Ev 102
28	Gay Hennessy and Wendy Atkinson, Head Teachers at Gateway Primary School and Edith Moorhouse Primary School, Carterton	Ev 105
29	Rebecca Maciejewski	Ev 105
30	Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families—Forces Help (SSAFA)	Ev 108
31	Jo Johnstone	Ev 108
32	Board of Governors, Zouch Primary School	Ev 109
33	Janice Oakley	Ev 110
34	Mike Cawson	Ev 111
35	Roger Felton	Ev 112
36	Nick Bennett, Naval Area Community Officer	Ev 114

List of unprinted written evidence

Additional papers have been received from the following and have been reported to the House but to save printing costs they have not been printed and copies have been placed in the House of Commons Library where they may be inspected by members. Other copies are in the Record Office, House of Lords and are available to the public for inspection. Requests for inspection should be addressed to the Record Office, House of Lords, London SW1A. Telephone (020 7219 3074) hours of inspection are from 9:30am to 5:00pm Mondays to Fridays.

Steven Law

Belinda Steele

Maureen Wicks

Karen Middleton

Malcolm Worker

Major Paul Smith

Duncan Baker

Susan Hieatt

Michael McNulty

Katie Pollock

Steve and Elizabeth Henson

Mrs M Williams

Bryan Abell

Eamonn Murphy

Jenny Alexander

Fiona Thomson

Steve Church

St Christopher's School, Gibraltar

Karen Philip

Jo Tymoshyshyn

Austin Boothroyd

Catherine Balfour

Neil Hainsworth

PO (AWT) DL Stares

Defence Committee Reports in this Parliament

Session 2005–06

First Report	Armed Forces Bill	HC 747 (<i>HC 1021</i>)
Second Report	Future Carrier and Joint Combat	HC 554 (<i>HC 926</i>)
Third Report	Delivering Front Line Capability to the RAF	HC 557 (<i>HC 1000</i>)
Fourth Report	Costs of peace-keeping in Iraq and Afghanistan: Spring Supplementary Estimate 2005–06	HC 980 (<i>HC 1136</i>)
Fifth Report	The UK deployment to Afghanistan	HC 558 (<i>HC 1211</i>)
Sixth Report	Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts 2004–05	HC 822 (<i>HC 1293</i>)
Seventh Report	The Defence Industrial Strategy	HC 824 (<i>HC 1488</i>)
Eighth Report	The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: the Strategic Context	HC 986 (<i>HC 1558</i>)
Ninth Report	Ministry of Defence Main Estimates 2006–07	HC 1366
Tenth Report	The work of the Met Office	HC 823