

Supporting Service children

Guidance for governing boards in schools and trusts

November 2023

Schools and trusts have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the needs, challenges and barriers faced by children of serving and ex-Armed Forces personnel.

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) define Service children as those (including adopted children) under the age of 18, who are **children of Service members or Service partners** – including both serving and veteran families – and any other children under the age of 18 that are otherwise the responsibility of Service members or Service partners.

The Armed Forces Covenant

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly.

The covenant's purpose is to redress the disadvantages that the Armed Forces community might experience in contrast to other citizens, and to honour the sacrifices they have made.

The MOD provide [statutory guidance for schools on the Armed Forces Covenant Duty](#).

Context

The Service pupil premium (SPP) was introduced by the Department for Education (DfE) in April 2011 to acknowledge the unique challenges faced by Service children. This initiative is part of the DfE's dedication to upholding the armed forces covenant.

Almost 80,000 children in England are eligible for SPP.

- They are in 52% of schools, including 48% of primary schools and 81% of secondary schools.
- While 50% of the cohort are educated in 8% of local authorities, Service children are found in every local authority bar one.
- Half of schools with Service children have only one or two, with the most common number on roll being one (31% of schools).

Specific needs of Service children

The [statutory guidance](#) identifies the following education-related disadvantages that can arise for Service children:

- an interrupted education
- a disrupted social experience
- negative impact on mental wellbeing
- difficult or longer journey times to school
- being unable to take holidays with parents during normal school holiday periods
- delays relating to support for Service children with additional needs

Some of the specific concerns voiced by pupils include:

- being worried when one of their parents is deployed, not knowing what's happening to them
- having lots of feelings that they don't know how to deal with
- trying to concentrate on homework when they're worried about their mum or dad
- moving schools, moving house and sometimes moving to a different country
- having to leave their friends and make new friends at a new school
- feeling that they have to look after the family when their dad or mum is away

School transfers and admissions

It is important that Service children face as little disruption as possible when moving between schools. An important way to support this process is the effective use of the [common transfer file \(CTF\)](#) which enables schools to share important information about Service children ahead of the move.

[The DfE's admissions code](#) requires local authorities to allocate a Service child a school place in advance of the family moving, with the freedom to grant admissions priority.

Service pupil premium

In England, state-funded schools receive SPP funding (currently £335 per pupil) for eligible pupils in reception through to year 11. The primary goal of this funding is to enable these schools to offer additional assistance and pastoral support tailored to the pupils' needs.

This support helps Service children cope with the potential impact of:

- **family mobility** (relocation within the UK or overseas) which can mean multiple, short-notice, mid-year moves and children feeling a lack of agency
- **parental deployments** which might include extended duty tours lasting six to nine months, participation in training courses, or shorter exercises spanning a few weeks

Eligibility

Schools receive SPP funding for each pupil who meets one of the following criteria:

- one of their parents is serving in the regular armed forces (including pupils with a parent who is on full commitment as part of the full-time reserve service)
- they have been registered as a 'Service child' on a school census in the past six years
- one of their parents died whilst serving in the armed forces and the pupil receives a pension under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme or the War Pensions Scheme
- one of their parents is in the armed forces of another nation and is stationed in England

Schools must identify children ahead of the autumn school census deadline in order to access SPP funding. Service parents need to make the school aware of their status by talking to the headteacher or school admin staff.

How the SPP differs to the pupil premium

The SPP is primarily intended for schools to offer **pastoral support** to Service children. In contrast, the [pupil premium](#) (PP) was established to raise educational attainment among socio-economically disadvantaged pupil groups. Schools should avoid conflating SPP with PP funding and should maintain separate records of expenditure for each premium.

It is considered best practice for schools to create a distinct SPP strategy statement to complement their existing pupil premium strategy.

The DfE provide [further guidance on SPP eligibility and spending](#).

The governing board's role

School leaders and their staff are best placed to understand the specific needs of their pupils and how funding should be spent to meet those needs.

The governing board is responsible for ensuring that SPP spending is targeted at the right pupils and is being used to meet their needs effectively. Governing boards fulfil this responsibility by:

- exploring the barriers to learning faced by pupils eligible for SPP
- using data, information and research to both support and challenge the school's approach
- contributing towards and approving the school's strategy for Service children
- monitoring the implementation and impact of the Service children strategy

The SCiP Alliance research

The Service Children's Progression (SCiP) Alliance has a range of [high quality research](#) aimed at improving policy and practice committed to supporting children and young people in Armed Forces families to thrive in education.

Providing effective support

It is important that the support available to Service children is effective in meeting their unique needs. The SCiP Alliance has created the [Thriving Lives Toolkit](#) which provides schools with an evidence based framework of 7 principles of effective support.

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

The SCiP Alliance provide a [wide range of case studies](#) where schools have successfully used the Thriving Lives Toolkit to provide effective support for Service pupils.

Creating a Service children strategy

We would encourage schools to develop a Service children strategy to ensure effective monitoring of compliance with legal duties, SPP spending and impact of interventions.

For the current academic year, this could include:

- your school's SPP grant allocation amount
- a summary of the main barriers faced by eligible pupils in the school
- how you'll spend the SPP to address those barriers and the reasons for that approach
- how you'll measure the impact of SPP spending
- the date of the next review of the school's SPP strategy

For the previous academic year, this could include:

- how the SPP allocation was spent
- the impact of the expenditure on eligible and other pupils

SPP funding is allocated for each financial year, but the information published could refer to the academic year, as this is how parents understand the school system.

Questions for boards to ask

- How many Service children does the school have? How many are eligible for the SPP?
- How much SPP funding does the school receive?
- How is the SPP funding allocated and targeted to support Service children in times of need?
- To what extent is the funding being spent effectively? How do you know?
- What is the impact of the spending on the experiences of eligible pupils?