RESEARCH ON EXPERIENCES OF SERVICE FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS IN EDUCATION IN WALES

Final Report

for SSCE Cymru

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1. INTRODUCTION

Supporting Service Children in Education (SSCE) Cymru has been successful in building momentum, awareness and creating a positive impact for Service children in Wales. SSCE has gained and communicated a better understanding of the issues affecting Service children here, recognising in particular that within this group there are particular risks associated with their mobility.

For children who have experienced significant moves, there is increased risk of a Special Educational Need (SEN) or Additional Learning Need (ALN) going unsupported, and challenges for local authorities/schools in assessing the child and implementing appropriate support before the child moves on again. Due to a lack of research and information available in Wales it was determined that we need to better understand the challenges families and schools are facing, particularly in light of the current changes underway to SEN/ALN education in Wales via the Welsh Government's Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018.

PROJECT SUMMARY AND APPROACH

Accordingly, the Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care, University of South Wales working in partnership with Arad Research (experts in education research in Wales) was commissioned by SSCE Cymru to explore the experiences of Service families with children who have Special Educational Needs/Additional Learning Needs (SEN/ALN). The study had three principal areas of inquiry:

1. Review and compile data on the number of Service children with SEN/ALN in Wales;
2. Research the experiences of families and stakeholders in respect of supporting Service children with SEN/ALN; and
3. Identify the implications of the research in practice, in the context of the Welsh ALN Act.

METHOD

The study was made up of a number of work packages, each of which constituted of different elements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Given the dearth of evidence in this area (hence commissioning this study) we felt that there was some advantage in spending a short time in reviewing what literature has been published in order to inform the rest of the study.

PRESENTATION TO SSCE CONFERENCE AND DESIGN OF WORKSHOP

We presented the study outline to the inaugural SSCE conference (16th May 2017 at Cardiff City Stadium) but in addition we worked with SSCE to develop an approach to a workshop that would follow the presentation. This involved designing a series of graphics that were used as a means to engage people in discussion.

DATA COLLECTION EXERCISE TO DETERMINE PROPORTION OF SEN/ALN WITHIN SERVICE CHILDREN POPULATION

Building on the existing good relations developed between SSCE and a number of schools in areas of Wales with significant concentrations of Service families, we devised a survey which was sent to all primary and secondary schools in Wales. The survey gathered data on the numbers of Service children in Wales, helped model the proportion of Service children across Wales who have ALN/SEN at different levels of need, and draw some comparisons with other children with and without ALN/SEN.

INTERVIEWS AND DISCUSSION GROUPS

We undertook 21 interviews and three discussion groups with family members, education staff, educational advisors and other key stakeholders to understand their perspectives on the issues. This qualitative research was focused on eliciting data on the experiences that Service children have gone through and the challenges they face.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The next chapter of the report provides the policy context and background to the Welsh position in respect of SEN/ALN, and is then followed by a review of literature relevant to the study. Thereafter we provide an analysis of the survey that was distributed to schools, and a thematic review of the key informant interviews that were undertaken. The report concludes with six evidence-based 'Areas for Further Consideration' which have emerged from the study.

2. POLICY CONTEXT

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill was passed by the National Assembly for Wales on 12 December 2017, a year after it was introduced to the Assembly's legislative process by the then Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language, Alun Davies AM. The legislation received Royal Assent on 24 January 2017 and became the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018.

On 11 December 2017, the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams AM, issued a statement setting out how the legislation will be implemented. The Welsh Government has decided to adopt a phased approach to implementation, with the new system established by the Act being introduced from September 2020. From September 2020, learners who are newly identified as having Additional Learning Needs will be supported under the new arrangements under the Act, whilst learners within the existing system will transition over the following three-year period.

The current Special Educational Needs system therefore remains in place for all learners with SEN/ALN until September 2020. Only after that point, will learners begin transitioning over to the new system. Further information about the planned changes as a result of the transformation programme are set out below. First, however, we provide a summary of the existing system and legal framework, which is the context for this research into Service children and SEN.

CURRENT POSITION AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The current arrangements for identifying and providing for SEN are rooted in the Education Act 1996 and set out in more detail in the SEN Code of Practice for Wales (introduced in 2002 and updated in 2004). The Education Act 1996 defines that children have Special Educational Needs (SEN) if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. A child or young person is defined as having a learning difficulty:

1. If they have significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children the same age,

2. If they have a disability which either prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of their age in schools within the area of the local authority, or

3. If they are under compulsory school age and fall within the definition at one or two or would if special educational provision was not made for them.

The Act states that special educational provision means: *For children aged two or over, educational provision that is additional to or otherwise different from the educational provision made generally for children of their age in maintained schools, other than special schools, in the area.*

SEN usually falls into four broad areas:

- Communication and interaction

- Cognition and learning

- Behaviour, emotional and social development

- Sensory and or physical.

The needs of learners in schools with SEN are currently met via three graduated stages of intervention:

- School Action: Additional support provided by the school

- School Action Plus: Additional support by schools together with external agencies

- Statement: In accordance with a local authority statement of SEN which provides a legal entitlement to a specified package of support.

In January 2017, 22.6 per cent of all pupils (105,577) at maintained schools in Wales had some form of Special Educational Need. 12,602 pupils had statements of SEN (2.7% of pupils) and a further 19.9 per cent of pupils had Special Educational Needs but no statement.[1]

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER THE CURRENT SYSTEM

The current SEN Code of Practice requires that local authorities, in partnership with schools, should 'place the highest priority on their statutory duty to promote high standards of education for all children, including those with SEN'. Local authorities have a responsibility to ensure the needs of children and young people with SEN are 'identified and assessed quickly and matched by appropriate provision'.

Local authorities are obliged to publish their SEN policies and information on how they are 'promoting high standards of education' for learners with SEN and encouraging them to 'participate fully in their school and local community'. Paragraph 1.24 of the Code advises that to fulfil their role effectively, local authorities should provide for the inclusion of SEN learners in mainstream schools. Schools and admission authorities cannot refuse to admit a child solely because they have SEN. For learners with SEN but no statement, the same admissions procedures must be followed as for other children.

Maintained schools and early years settings must have a written SEN policy. Schools must have a 'responsible person' (usually the Head Teacher although it may be a governor) who ensures all teachers know about a pupil's SEN. The Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) is the member of staff at a school who has responsibility for co-ordinating SEN provision within that school. In a small school, this may be the Head Teacher or Deputy Head whilst, in a large school, there may be a SEN co-ordinating team. The SENCo has an instrumental role in working with the classroom teacher(s) in identifying a pupil's SEN and what form of intervention is required.

The governing bodies of maintained schools must 'use their best endeavours' to ensure the necessary provision is made for any pupil with SEN. Governing bodies must also report annually to parents on how the school's SEN policy is being implemented. Where a learner has a statement,

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[1] Schools Census Results, 2017 (Welsh Government, Statistical First Release 77/2017)

the local authority is responsible for ensuring the provision set out in that statement is delivered. Where they do not have a statement, the school is responsible for deciding what is needed and making that provision.

THE ALN TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME AND LEGISLATION: THE RATIONALE FOR CHANGE

The introduction of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill on 12 December 2016, (subsequently the Act) followed a series of reviews, committee inquiries, policy proposals, consultations, a White Paper and a draft Bill. Over a sustained period of time, stakeholders, campaigners and families had called for reform and legislation was considered overdue. The legislation was therefore widely supported by political parties and stakeholders.

A recent NAW Research Briefing summarised the rationale for change as follows:

> *The Welsh Government has been unequivocal about the need for change. It has long recognised that the existing Special Educational Needs (SEN) system is 'based on a model introduced more than 30 years ago' and is 'no longer fit for purpose'. When introducing the Bill, the Welsh Government described it as an 'ambitious law to create a bold new approach' and a 'complete overhaul' of the way children and young people's learning needs are met in Wales.[2]*

The ALN Transformation Programme is intended to transform the current system, so that it will:

− Ensure that all learners with ALN are supported to overcome barriers to learning and can achieve their full potential.

− Improve the planning and delivery of support for learners from 0 to 25 with ALN, placing learners' needs, views, wishes and feelings at the heart of the process.

− Focus on the importance of identifying needs early and putting in place timely and effective interventions which are monitored and adapted to ensure they deliver the desired outcomes.

OVERVIEW OF THE ACT

The Act establishes a new statutory framework for supporting children and young people with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), from birth; whilst they are in school; and, if they are over compulsory school age, while they are in further education. The Act, and the new framework it creates, will replace the separate legislation and arrangements in Wales for Special Educational Needs (SEN) up to age 16, and Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (LDD) post-16

The new term, Additional Learning Needs (ALN) will be applied within a single legislative framework for all children and young people up to the age of 25 who are identified as having those needs. The definition which the Act uses for ALN is materially the same as the current legal definition of SEN.

Of particular note are two developments. Firstly, the Individual Development Plan (IDP). Where a

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[2] http://www.assembly.wales/Research%20Documents/18-023/18-23-Web-English.pdf

governing body of a school or Further Education Institution (FEI) decides that a pupil/student does have ALN, section 12 of the Act requires them to prepare and maintain an IDP for them. Therefore, all learners with ALN will have the same type of statutory plan irrespective of their age or whether they are in a school, a school sixth form or an FEI. Secondly, Section 61 of the Act imposes a new duty on health boards to appoint a Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer (DECLO). This new role must be undertaken by a member of staff who is a registered medical practitioner, or a registered nurse or other heath professional. The DECLO will not be routinely involved in the assessment and reviews of specific IDPs, except in the course of their usual clinical practice, but will be responsible for ensuring that the appropriate health board input is provided. Day-to-day operational functions will be undertaken by health professionals in contact with the child or young person, acting as a 'health co-ordinator' at a local level, and ensuring the role of the NHS in the ALN system is mainstreamed. For a more detailed explanation of the provisions of the Act, see Research Briefing Act Summary: Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018.[3]

The Act requires the Welsh Government to produce an ALN Code. This will provide most of the detail for the way assessments and decisions about provision will be carried out, with the Act setting the overall framework. The Welsh Government provided the National Assembly's Children, Young People and Education Committee with a working draft of the Code in February 2017, which the Committee published to assist stakeholders' input into scrutiny of the Bill.

The Welsh Government emphasised that the draft Code was 'very much a work in progress' and was made available 'solely for illustrative purposes' to support scrutiny of the Bill. It said the draft Code itself was not subject to scrutiny at that point but would be fully consulted on when a formal version is prepared following the successful passage of the legislation. The Draft Code of Practice for Additional Learning Needs[4] however does refer to the specific issues linked to service-induced mobility and notes that local authorities should take account of the particular needs of Service children when providing or planning additional learning provision for Service children with ALN which is positive. The Welsh Government will produce a final ALN Code prior to implementation of the new system, in line with the requirements of the Act.

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[3] ibid. See also http://www.assembly.wales/Research%20Documents/18-023/18-23-Web-English.pdf.
[4]
http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s59527/Draft%20Additional%20Learning%20Needs%20Code%20February%202017.pdf

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature relating to the impact of mobility on Service children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) or Additional Learning Needs (ALN) is extremely limited in Wales and the UK as a whole. Most of the research and published work has been based on the experiences of Service children in the United States. The experiences and needs of Service children will vary greatly from that of their non-service peers (O'Neill, 2012), but some Service children have additional issues relating to their SEN/ALN which become more prevalent as a result of geographical mobility. These issues include the fear of a new home, a new location, a new school and having to make new friends (Ofsted, 2011); all of which can seem even more daunting to a child with SEN/ALN.

Service families with children who have SEN/ALN encounter many issues; these include delayed transition of school/medical records, accessing specialist provision for the child, delayed assessments, different methods of teaching, changes in curriculum outside of Wales, limited access to outside agencies, cultural differences and lack of contingency funding to name but a few. For the purpose of this report, literature relating to Service children with SEN/ALN will be acknowledged as much as possible; however, due to the paucity of such specific literature the report will also focus on Service children in general.

In 2011, the *Welsh Government Package of Support for the Armed Forces Community in Wales* was established to ensure that members of the Armed Forces are not disadvantaged in accessing public services (SSCE Cymru, 2015). The package of support was updated in 2013 to include further signposting for the Armed Forces community to a range of public services including education, housing, healthcare, childcare, employment and more. Armed Forces Community Covenants were created as part of the Armed Forces Covenant.[5] All 22 local authorities in Wales are signed up to an Armed Forces Community Covenant to meet the needs of the Armed Forces community within that particular local authority (SSCE Cymru, 2015). Unfortunately, there is at present, no accurate data about how many Service children there are in Wales, especially with SEN/ALN, as this information is not currently collected. The 2011 census data however, does stipulate that there are Service families with children aged 0-15 across all 22 local authorities in Wales and a minimum number of 2,486 children in Wales where the HRP (Household Reference Person) indicated that they were in the Armed Forces; not including children living with veterans or reservists (SSCE Cymru, 2015). According to SSCE Cymru (2015, p.12), to address this issue, a number of schools in Wales (no figure given), are using informal methods to collect relevant data, with some local authorities (no figures given), including a tick box on their admission forms to record the number of Service children per se, as well as Service children with SEN/ALN. With regards to the UK in general, O'Neill (2012) states that "estimates of the numbers of Service children [for the UK as a whole] range from 90,000 quoted by Ofsted (Ofsted, 2005, para 15) up to 174,341 estimated by The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund (Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund,

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[5] On the Armed Forces Covenant see: https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/armed-forces-covenant. For more on the Armed Forces Community Covenant see: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/armed-forces-community-covenant/armed-forces-community-covenant

2009, p.13)".

Although there is no distinct funding in Wales for Service children through a Service Pupil Premium (SPP), funding is available to support all learners to ensure they are not disadvantaged. This funding is provided in the form of grants from the Welsh Government, Community Funding grants and from the Ministry of Defence (MoD) Education Support Fund for specific projects that will benefit Service children within the school community. The Education Support Fund is due to end at the close of the academic year 2017-2018. In England however, schools are allocated an SPP of £300 to assist with pastoral support for each Service child who meets the eligible criteria (MoD, 2016). According to McCullouch and Hall (2016, p.13), "movement during the school year may create specific challenges for schools and local authorities. Schools are allocated their funding once per year, based on the number enrolled at the census point in the autumn term; no account is taken of additional pupils after the census point". This can result in schools effectively running with no additional funding or some benefiting from funding after a Service Child has already left, perhaps impacting on the ability of schools to respond to specific learning needs (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2013).

It is the Service parents' responsibility to register their child's SEN/ALN or disability with the Children's Education Advisory Service (CEAS) in order to obtain advice and specialist support (army.mod.uk, 2014); this includes Service families in Wales (SSCE Cymru, 2015). It is also the Service parents' responsibility to register an additional need with the commanding officer through the single service policies; for the Army, this is mandatory (NHS, 2015). Armed Forces families accessing services within the UK and frequently moving due to postings are responsible for informing their local GP, health visitor, dentist, school nurses and other services of their individual circumstances (NHS, 2015). By proactively informing these services before a move, it will ensure medical/educational records are transferred which will enable the continuity of any care and support that family members may receive.

Ofsted (2011) stated that their inspectors found that important information regarding the transfer of statements of Special Educational Needs between some schools in England was unacceptable and detrimental to a child's educational needs. Currently, there is a statutory obligation on local authorities in England and Wales to "carry on maintaining statements and arranging the Special Educational Needs provision in those statements for pupils who move into their areas"; The Education (Special Educational Needs) (England) (consolidation) Regulations 2001 – Regulation 23. When a child moves from a maintained or independent school in England to another school either in England or in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, the governing body of that school is under a duty to transfer the pupil record of that child to the new school no later than 15 days after the date the child ceases to be registered at the school (hants.gov.uk, 2009). However, according to the Centre of Social Justice (CSJ) (2016) these statements providing important information are often delayed, or not received at all. This has far-reaching educational implications for the child who is already experiencing regular moves. It has been suggested that teachers struggle with gaps and absences and a curriculum that Service children have to catch up on (Clifton, 2007). Academic targets can also be difficult to create for children whose education has been so disrupted (Ofsted,

2011). Pupil Information Profile (PIP) forms (MoD, 2014) and Moving Schools Children's Activity Packs (Naval Families Federation, 2015), filled in by the child and sent to the school, have gone some way to addressing the lack of communication between schools (CSJ, 2016).

Mobility of Service children between schools has been identified as a particular matter of concern for Service parents (National Audit Office, 2013). Mobility has been associated with low educational attainment, whereby mobile Service children are thought to perform less well than non-mobile Service children (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2013). This is not always the case, as mobility also has potential benefits. These include the possibility for children to strengthen their resilience, develop the skills to socialise and make new friends quickly, and the opportunity to gain a wider range of experiences than their non-mobile peers (Department for Education, 2013). A study carried out by Kane (2017) in the Highlands, Scotland over a two year period (2015-2017), explored two purposes. The primary purpose was to explore the impact of key elements of the Highland Practice Model on the educational, social and emotional needs of children and young people from Armed Forces families. The secondary purpose was to gain a fuller understanding of what constitutes effective support in order to improve the school experience of that particular group of pupils. The research revealed that Service children were concerned about curricular challenges, joining new schools, cross border transfers, loss of network of friends and adjusting to new schools; these issues (mentioned above) were also highlighted by Service children in England and Wales. A number of recommendations were made to help improve the school experience of Service children including raising awareness of the needs of Armed Forces pupils, regular meetings between Armed Forces and civilian pupils to promote joint understanding, the introduction of peer mentor schemes and the establishment of a UK wide Education Passport from nursery to S6[6] highlighting topics covered, thereby avoiding repetitive learning (Kane, 2017).

As military families are often posted away from their close family members, it is possible that health services may be requested by them more than non-military families. Flake et al. (2009) suggest that primary care providers need to take military families' concerns seriously, especially when there is increased risk of psychosocial problems in children. Therefore, it can be assumed that partners of Service personnel adopt coping strategies and take on a dual role; that of mother and father. Studies of the effects of deployment on children and adolescents are particularly prevalent and their mental health is of key concern. Parental deployment can lead to feelings of fearfulness, worry and concern about a parent's location and safety coupled with extended separation and the problems that can cause. Roles within the remaining family can change, such as older siblings having to care for younger ones and taking on more household chores, which can affect wellbeing and ability to participate in social activities. Flake et al. (2009) found that more than one third of school-age children were high risk for psychosocial difficulties when one parent was deployed. Barker and Berry (2009) found that when a parent was deployed, children showed increased behaviour problems compared to those whose parent was not deployed; this was especially true where children had existing anxiety issues and/or when there were parental stresses.

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[6] S6 in Scotland is the equivalent to Year 12 in Wales.

It is evident from the sparse studies carried out on Service children with SEN/ALN that their experiences are unique and offer both challenges and benefits. The resilience of the child will affect how they cope with issues they face (O'Neill, 2010). The way they negotiate transitions will depend on the quality of the relationship they have with their family and friends and the support they receive from school staff, welfare officers and Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators. Children are resilient and find their own coping strategies, despite their learning disabilities but their voices need to be heard and their families must take an active role in their support packages. Effective links to community organisations and other outside agencies need to be encouraged to support their well-being and extra funding needs to be made available to provide effective pastoral care. Finally, it is important that multi-agency collaboration is encouraged so that specialist professional support is available when required, as outside agencies do not always have a clear understanding of the obstacles Service children and their family face.

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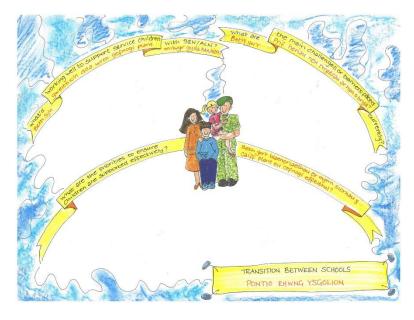
4. FEEDBACK FROM THE SSCE CONFERENCE

At the All Wales Conference for Service Children in Education on the 16th May 2017, a number of guest speakers addressed topics such as Service children and emotional literacy, Service children with Special Educational Needs/Additional Learning Needs, empowering Service children and collaboration and good practice. Those in attendance at the conference including representatives of the military, education, local authorities, support services, schools and charities, all of whom had an affiliation with families of Service children.

This section of the report focuses on the feedback provided by the attendees after completing a written exercise, whereby they were asked to comment on our graphical pro formas on three topics, namely; (a) Transition between schools, (b) Role of the Service family, (3) Identifying needs, Making assessments and Providing support to Service children with SEN/ALN.

TRANSITION BETWEEN SCHOOLS

Attendees were asked to complete three sections of this topic; (a) what was working well, (b) challenges and barriers, (c) ensuring effective support. The feedback gathered from what was working well, suggested that transition between schools generally went well, especially if a pro-active stance was taken involving early engagement with agencies, The Families Federations, SENCo Liaison and Community Development Officers. It was also suggested that educational information and support was available at new MoD locations, schools had support staff in place to make the transition to a new school easier for the child concerned and schools adopted an inclusive approach to vulnerable learners, such as providing a well-being team, check-in/out, drop-ins, induction/exit pack and access to relevant clubs for children.

The feedback from challenges and barriers section revealed that there were cultural differences when transitioning between nations and overseas, a lack of contingency funding and advocacy and different funding in different areas. It was also suggested that parents were often unwilling to acknowledge their child(s) SEN/ALN and those that did, sometimes delayed bringing the information to the schools. Other concerns raised, focused on the difficult process of transferring information between schools, local authority admissions teams not asking the right questions or accurately sharing the information they receive, mid-term/short notice transfers, a delay in the child accessing provisions due to a delay in transition if the child is on a hospital/medical/

educational psychologist waiting list. Finally, it was assumed that the greater the child's needs, the greater the barriers.

Feedback from ensuring effective support revealed a list of criteria that needs to be met; this includes a need to put an Individual Educational Plan (IEP)/Support plan in place that fits with the school's policies and adapting/changing the IEP to the new environment or pupil's progress, common language used on assessments/records. A clear understanding of the child's needs must be acknowledged and this could be achieved by clear communication across agencies/providing comprehensive information for transfer; early notice of Service move to set process in motion; identifying issues around the family dynamics; educating staff in schools; professionals being clear about what they are able to share regarding the best interests of the child when moving on, and dialogue with interagency/professionals working with ALN child across transition; to give up-to-date reports. Finally, it was suggested that SEN information from outside Wales should be transferable, e.g. occupational therapy report and medical assessment and that ESF funding should be continued.

ROLE OF THE SERVICE FAMILY

Feedback regarding what was working well focused on specialist support, and an increased focus on identification/ support for children with SEN/ALN; this seemed to work well if families knew what they were entitled to and how to obtain it. A limited amount of funding streams were available to families, as well as websites and resources for families and schools such as SSCE Cymru.

Feedback from the challenges and barriers section revealed that there was a lack of knowledge on where to turn for help and who was able to advocate on behalf of the family and the child. A dependency culture with the Army that leads to "this should be done for my child", rather than "what can I do?" "What is my role for my child?" Other factors included: families that do not know what they are entitled to; a lack of resources; the emotional state of the child/family and associated health problems; physical location/transport and the Service Pupil Premium not being available in Wales.

Feedback from ensuring effective support revealed the need to redesign paperwork so that the child's information is at the front of any deployment forms that personnel have to complete when moving. Linked to this were calls for families to receive local information and advice from support services/agencies, and to have in place a single point of contact and advocacy support for less informed, less confident, less assertive parents.

IDENTIFYING NEEDS, MAKING ASSESSMENTS AND PROVIDING SUPPORT

Feedback regarding what was working well revealed that children did well in schools where staff understood the Service child agenda, where records were routinely passed on and where there were no gaps in waiting for MoD Education Support Fund. Other positive issues included identifying emotional and behavioural issues effectively; referring families to external support agencies, working with ALNCo, teachers and LSAs using a variety of data to support learners, one-to-one intervention or in-class support and friendship group support.

Feedback from the challenges and barriers section revealed there was no special training in assessing children from Armed Forces families, challenges integrating complex needs into existing systems, changes in curriculum outside of Wales. Parents lacking social skills that influence the child, and not always embracing the learning to support the child was identified. Finally, different policies that provide different levels of support and support mechanisms were noted e.g. Pupil Premium in England, not Wales, and mobility whereby a child has moved on too quickly before the school has a chance to address their issues.

Feedback from ensuring effective support revealed the need for MoD Welfare Officers to provide information for families and to articulate why the MoD asks for information/data. Links with local authority Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) teams for support were identified, alongside removing the data protection barriers that prevent local authorities talking to each other. Ensure the 'Rights' issue is on the Children's Commissioner's agenda and for the Children's Commissioner to unify legislation in order to have cohesion between each nation's legislation was suggested. 'Portable passports'; to put the child at the centre and cut out the bureaucracy was proposed, alongside the idea of an individual pupil reference number for all MoD pupils held on a central database that could be amended with information such as test results, behaviour, social information etc. A record of progress that goes with the child to the new school was noted and that the funding should go with the child, not to the school. Ensuring that the covenant works for Service children was discussed and finally, it was suggested that schools should publicise a plan on how they support military families and Estyn should monitor this, and using Hwb, it could be made to work in Wales.

The feedback gathered on all three topics revealed some interesting thoughts and opinions on what was working well, what needed to be improved and how an effective outcome could be reached. Much needs to be done in Wales to ensure that Service children with SEN/ALN and their

families are supported appropriately. Adopting effective multi-agency collaboration, improving communication between agencies and issuing a unique 'portable passport' or pupil reference number, would be one step closer to ensuring that the needs of Service children and their families in Wales would be met.

5. ANALYSIS OF SURVEY DATA FROM SCHOOLS

This section provides an overview of the data collected as part of the school survey that was conducted during December 2017 and January 2018. The aim of the survey was to compile data on the number of Service children in education in Wales, as well as the number of those with different types of ALN/SEN.

The survey, which was distributed to all primary, middle and secondary schools in Wales, asked for data on the number of pupils and Service children with Statements of SEN, at School Action and School Action Plus.

The questionnaire template used is included in Appendix 1.

A NOTE ON THE DATA COLLECTED

The data we were aiming to collect from schools had not been previously collected. Data on Service children with SEN is not held centrally by either local authorities or the Welsh Government. Indeed, schools themselves do not hold this data on a single database. Schools' SEN registers include information on all learners with Special Educational Needs, by type of provision. Where pupils' parents or carers work for the armed Services (where this is known to the school) this is usually recorded separately on school management information systems.

Schools were therefore being asked to compile or match data from different data sets in order to complete the short questionnaire that was sent to them.

In some cases, this appears to have been problematic for schools. 163 responses were received, however over 42 of these were incomplete and were excluded from the sample. The total number of responses included in our analysis was 121.

RESPONSES BY LOCAL AUTHORITY AREA

Complete responses were received from at least one school in 21 out of the 22 local authorities. 106 responses were received from primary schools, with 15 from secondary schools. The ratio of primary to secondary schools within our sample (7:1), is broadly consistent with the overall ratio of primary to secondary schools across Wales 6.5:1 (based on PLASC data, 2017). Figure 1 provides a breakdown of responses by local authority. The number of responses per local authority ranges from 11 to a single response. One local authority returned no responses.

OVERVIEW OF DATA COLLECTED

The total number of pupils in the schools included in the sample is 37,062, which represents approximately eight per cent of the total school population. Within this sample, there are 8,220 with Special Educational Needs, which equates to **22.2 per cent**. Across Wales as a whole **22.8 per cent** of pupils have SEN (January 2017 data, PLASC).

BREAKDOWN BY TYPE OF SEN PROVISION

As can be seen in Table 1, the sample includes 648 pupils with statutory Statements of SEN, 3431 at School Action Plus and a further 4141 being supported through School Action. Within our sample, the breakdown of pupils with SEN is as follows:

- **7.9** per cent of the pupils with Special Educational Needs have Statements of SEN.

- **41.7** per cent of the pupils with Special Educational Needs have School Action Plus.

- **50.4** per cent of the pupils with Special Educational Needs have School Action.

Based on the most recently published data collected through PLASC (2017), across Wales as a whole the breakdown of pupils with SEN is as follows:

- **11.9** per cent of the pupils with Special Educational Needs have Statements of SEN.

- **31.9** per cent of the pupils with Special Educational Needs have School Action Plus.

- **56.1** per cent of the pupils with Special Educational Needs have School Action.

This reveals that the breakdown of pupils with different type of SEN provision within our sample is broadly in line with the overall national picture, with some variations in overall proportions.

Table 1. *Pupils with SEN/ALN, by type of provision (N=121 schools)*

	Total number of children and Service children – Academic year 2017-18 All LAs		Total number of pupils with SEN/ALN, by type of provision and total number of Service children in the school with SEN/ALN, by type of provision – Academic year 2017-18					
	Total No. children in the schools	Total No. Service children in the schools	Statemented		School Action Plus		School Action	
			All pupils	Service children	All pupils	Service children	All pupils	Service children
Total	37062	361 (0.97%)	648 (1.75%)	6 (1.66%)	3431 (9.26%)	22 (6.09%)	4141 (11.17%)	22 (6.09%)

ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY ON THE DATA COLLECTED

As noted above, the current system of Special Educational Needs is undergoing significant and far-reaching reform, set out in the provisions of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. The current distinction between statements of SEN, and School Action or School Action Plus, will no longer exist. Instead, all learners with ALN will have a statutory Individual Development Plan (IDP).

For the purposes of this research, however, we have framed our data collection around the current system and types of provision. The sections below present comparisons based on three sets of data in relation to the types of SEN provision: the most recent all-Wales data, drawn from the PLASC (2017); data relating to all pupils from the sample of 121 schools who completed the survey; data in relation to Service children from our sample of schools.

The SEN Code of Practice for Wales, which took effect in 2002, advocated a graduated approach to supporting children with SEN. This approach recognises that there is a continuum of SEN and that schools should make full use of available classroom and school resources before calling upon outside resources and/or more specialist expertise. The following sections discuss briefly these differentiated approaches and the data collected in relation to each tier/type of support.

SCHOOL ACTION

School Action is the first of the three tiers of intervention. Pupils receive support under School Action when a class teacher or the SENCo identifies a child who 'requires interventions that are additional to or different from those provided as part of the school's usual differentiated curriculum offer and strategies'.[7] The Code of Practice notes that the basis for intervention through School Action could be concern, supported by evidence, that a child, despite receiving differentiated learning opportunities:

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[7] http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/131016-sen-code-of-practice-for-wales-en.pdf (p.51)

- Makes little or no progress even when teaching approaches are targeted particularly in a child's identified area of weakness

- Shows signs of difficulty in developing literacy or mathematics skills which result in poor attainment in some curriculum areas

- Presents persistent emotional or behavioural difficulties which are not ameliorated by the behavioural management techniques usually employed in the school

- Has sensory or physical problems, and continues to make little or no progress despite the provision of specialist equipment

- Has communication and/or interaction difficulties and continues to make little or no progress despite the provision of a differentiated curriculum.[8]

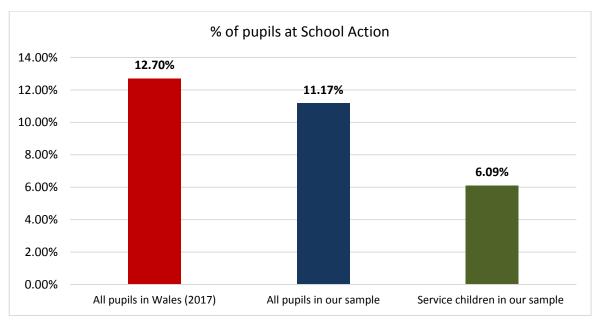As can be seen in Figure 2, below, in 2017 12.7 per cent of all pupils in Wales were being supported at School Action. Across our sample of 121 schools surveyed, a slightly lower, however still comparable proportion of pupils (11.17 per cent) were at School Action. Notably, the percentage of Service children being supported at this level is considerably lower than the percentage of all pupils from across our sample – at 6.1 per cent. **Albeit based on a small sample size, the differential of five percentage points is interesting in that it would appear to support comments received during the qualitative phase of the research, where parents, practitioners and stakeholders expressed the view that the Additional Learning Needs of Service children with lower levels of need are more likely to go unidentified and unsupported.**

One explanation for this may be that the transient nature of this population may make it less likely for any initial differentiated learning approaches to be evaluated and, in turn, progressed onto support through School Action.

Figure 2. *Percentage of pupils at School Action (N=121 for 2018 data)*
Sources: Welsh Government, PLASC (2017); survey of schools (2018)

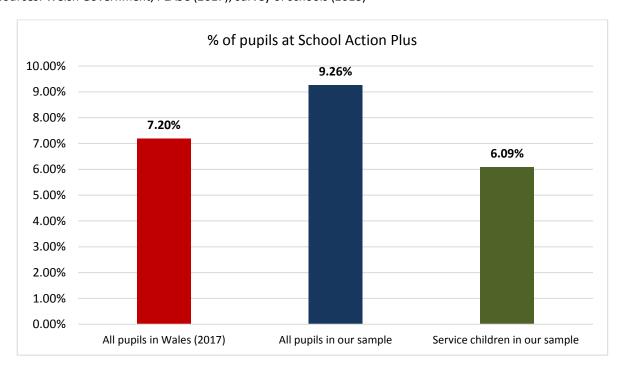[8] http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/131016-sen-code-of-practice-for-wales-en.pdf (p.51-52)

SCHOOL ACTION PLUS

Where interventions under School Action do not deliver adequate results, the SENCo and the teachers may decide in consultation with parents and specialists to involve external support services. The Code of Practice describes the basis for School Action Plus as being that, despite receiving an individualised programme and/or concentrated support under School Action, the child:

− Continues to make little or no progress in specific areas over a long period

− Continues working at National Curriculum levels substantially below that expected of children of a similar age

− Continues to have difficulty in developing literacy and numeracy skills

− Has emotional or behavioural difficulties which substantially and regularly interfere with the child's own learning or that of the class group, despite having an individualised behaviour management programme

− Has sensory or physical needs, and requires additional specialist equipment or regular advice or visits by a specialist service

− Has ongoing communication or interaction difficulties that impede the development of social relationships and cause substantial barriers to learn.

As can be seen in Figure 3 below, in 2017, 7.2 per cent of all pupils in Wales were being supported at School Action Plus. Across our sample of 121 schools surveyed, a higher proportion of pupils (9.3 per cent) were at School Action Plus. As with School Action, the percentage of Service children being support at this level of support is lower than the percentage of all pupils from across our sample – at 6.1 per cent.

Figure 3. Percentage of pupils at School Action Plus (N=121 for 2018 data)
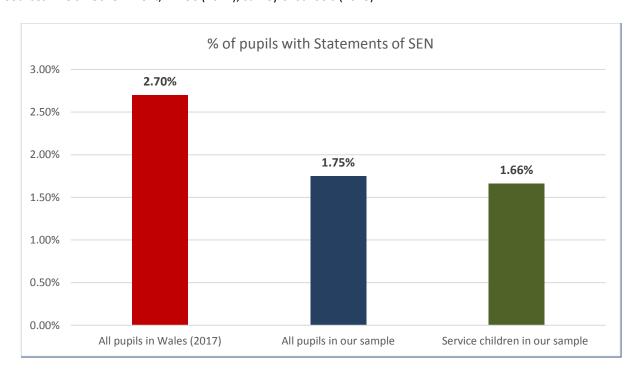Sources: Welsh Government, PLASC (2017); survey of schools (2018)

The requirements set out in the Code of Practice that children's progress should be monitored over 'a long period' and the emphasis on 'ongoing' difficulties as a basis for providing support at School Action Plus raises questions. One hypothesis presented during qualitative research is that, as Service children transition to different schools between postings, they may not be monitored in a sustained way, resulting in fewer pupils receiving the required level of support from specialists and external agencies.

STATEMENTS OF SEN

Where School Action and School Action Plus have not led to sufficient improvement, or where the learner's needs are sufficiently serious, a statutory assessment may be undertaken by the local authority. This may in turn lead to the local authority issuing a statement of the child's SEN. Up until now, in these cases, the local authority assumes legal responsibility for making provision to meet specified needs. The local authority has a duty to arrange the special educational provision in a child's statement.

In 2017, 2.7 per cent of pupils in Wales had a Statement of SEN. The percentage of pupils with Statements across our sample of 121 schools is one percentage point lower, which is mirrored by the number of Service children with Statements (1.75 and 1.66 per cent respectively – see Figure 4).

***Figure 4**. Percentage of pupils with Statements of SEN (N=121 for 2018 data)*
Sources: Welsh Government, PLASC (2017); survey of schools (2018)

% of pupils with Statements of SEN

- All pupils in Wales (2017): 2.70%
- All pupils in our sample: 1.75%
- Service children in our sample: 1.66%

DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN SCHOOLS INCLUDED WITHIN THE SAMPLE

There are wide variations in the numbers of Service children enrolled in schools across Wales, with some schools having significantly higher concentrations of Service children due to their proximity to military bases in Powys, the Vale of Glamorgan, Pembrokeshire and Anglesey. Seven schools

that provided data reported having ten or more Service children and, as part of the analysis, we separated these from the remaining data to compare the findings and explore whether there were any differences in the data between the two datasets.

The rationale for doing this was that there had been some suggestions that those schools with larger numbers of Service children were likely to be better equipped and accustomed to responding to the needs of Service children, including those with Additional Learning Needs. Comparisons between those schools with 'higher concentrations' of Service children and other schools were, however, quantitatively inconclusive, mainly due to the small sample size involved and, consequently, the low numbers of learners with SEN.

ESTIMATING THE NUMBER OF SERVICE CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS IN WALES

The data collected through our survey, although limited, provides a basis on which to estimate the number of Service children in schools in Wales. This estimate requires a number of assumptions to be made and, as such, the figures are approximations and are to be approached with caution. The key assumptions we have made are:

- As noted above, some schools have higher concentrations of Service children. We believe that this modelling exercise to estimate the number of Service children in schools in Wales is best approached by differentiating between schools with higher concentrations of Service children (e.g. 10+ Service children) and the remainder (i.e. the vast majority) of schools with very low numbers of Service children. We estimate that we have collected responses from approximately half of these schools with high concentrations of Service children.

- That those schools with higher concentrations included are broadly representative of schools in close proximity to military bases in terms of their size and number of Service children.

- That the remaining schools in our sample are also representative of the other schools across Wales in terms of the number of Service children. The number of Service children in these schools ranges from zero to six, however in most cases no Service children were recorded. On average, there are two Service children to every three schools.

Data from seven 'higher concentration schools' in close proximity to military bases revealed that in these schools there were 286 Service children. Assuming that this sample accounts for around half of all schools in this category, we estimate that there are approximately 570 Service children enrolled at these 'higher concentration schools'.

Across the remaining 114 schools in our sample, there are 75 Service children enrolled. If this eight per cent sample is reflected across Wales and scaled up, this would provide an estimated 937 Service children in all other schools. This modelling exercise, therefore, provides a tentative estimate of **1507** (570+937). Given the data at our disposal, it is undoubtedly more sensible to present this information as an estimated population within a range that also applies a 10%+/- margin for error.

Based on this we arrive at a broad approximation of the total population of Service children enrolled at schools in Wales as being between 1350 and 1650. It is important to recognise that this is a different value to that which comes from the 2011 Census data. The Census suggests that of the Service families with children aged 0-15 across all 22 local authorities in Wales, there are a minimum number of 2,486 children in Wales where the HRP (Household Reference Person) indicated that they were in the Armed Forces (but does not include children living with veterans or reservists). The difference between these values is a significant one, and underlines the need to systematise and standardise data collection processes in Wales.

6. KEY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The following section represents the issues that have emerged through the thematic analysis of the 21 interviews and three discussion groups that were undertaken with key stakeholders. Direct quotations are in italics, and the chapter is structured around five main topics.

EXPERIENCE OF SERVICE CHILDREN IN TRANSITION

The first key area centres on the experiences of Service children and family members as they transition between schools, a common occurrence for very many Service children. Given the frequency of school-to-school transition, Service children are described as often being in a bubble, hiding behind a lens, and this perception is exacerbated when the child has ALN/SEN.

"A lot of military children who come, they've got this excellent protective layer that they put on. They would be in a class situation and the bravado you see you'd think 'oh my gosh they are fine, they haven't got a problem at all'. And then the deputy head will email to ask 'could you work with so and so' and I think really? They are a confident, bubbly outgoing person but they send the data and then you go 'oh my gosh'. They've got a protective layer because of moving and they have resilience. They build up relationships with friends very quickly at the school. They're very good at covering it [their additional learning need]" (Teacher/Learning Support Assistant).

"The number of Service children in our school varies, and it can be very difficult to count them. You get an inkling as to whether they are a Service family as they will often arrive mid-year. We try to ask and establish whether they are a Service family or not, and to work closely with the SENCo/ALNCo. The biggest concern is that as pupils move around so often, things get missed. If it's not a long term posting, it's often not the school's fault that children aren't picked up. And it's often the ones in the middle that get missed out – if the need is complex and pupils have a statement they are easier to see – for those with very mild symptoms it doesn't matter so much. But the ones in the middle often can get missed" (School staff member).

Service children end up in a fairly constant cycle of change, often based around a timeframe of a typical two-year posting. It was suggested to us that there is a degree of disengagement up to six months ahead of a move, and then there is a parallel six-month period of settling in after transition. Following this there is a period of around 12 months of stable schooling, and then the cycle begins again with the disengagement six months ahead of the next transition. All of this means that in every two years of schooling, some Service pupils only experience a one-year period of stability: *"All too often the transition doesn't happen well, information doesn't move, and parents are being told that their child will be reviewed for the first six months of their time in the new school before a decision is taken. When you move school every two years, there might be up to seven periods of 'six-month review' in a child's school career which is three and a half years of time which is unnecessary, if only different schools and nations trusted the judgements of others." (Stakeholder*

organisation). All of these pressures are exacerbated if parents are promoted mid placement – *"one of the parents can find that they get a new job half way through and after 12 months they've gone" (Teacher/Learning Support Assistant)* – coupled with the fact that parents can form perceptions that their children aren't always the top priority within busy schools: *"There can be an attitude of 'he's only here for two years'" (Parent).*

IMPACT OF MOVING, TRANSITION AND (RE)ASSESSMENT

Every child is different and it was suggested that if you have got a child who is struggling emotionally with the move, there are likely to be significant impacts on their work, and it may then take schools longer to work out if pupils have ALN/SEN. Teachers who we interviewed suggested that it would vary, but that no school would make a firm decision about putting children on an ALN/SEN register for at least a term, and would be completing a range of interventions and diagnostic tests during that time: *"The protocol would be for class teacher to try what the class teacher knows best and then to engage in discussions with parents. As a senior teacher I might go in and work with the child and do various activities. We would spend a whole term doing that at least, and then sit down and start having the official discussions with mum and dad. We'd pick up the phone and speak to previous school as well as trawling through whatever records were sent with the child" (Senior teacher).*

Of particular frustration to parents in the moves between different postings and placements, is the need to be (re)assessed each time. There was greater appreciation that at the lower levels of support – school action and school action plus – there wasn't such clear evidence of decisions and determinations, but for parents, there was an expectation that a legal Statement of Special Needs would act as a 'passport':

> *"It's really annoying to be honest. The local authority I'm moving to haven't outright rejected it, but they told me that the statement is not really recognised in England anymore because they use something that's called something else. It's probably the same thing but it's called something else. That's so frustrating. So I ask 'when can I start getting my son into speech and language support and therapy?' and they said that you have to wait until you get to the new school, and the school will refer him. But I already know he needs speech and language, and the statement says he needs speech and language. The Army has got a copy of the statement and it's stupid that I've got to go through that process again, it took so long first time around. They know from his paper work that he's got the statement and that he needs one-on-one supervision. And it's not even a funding problem which I know it can be. The school have contacted me and they know from the statement what his support needs are. The school have told me they've got the funding to do one on one which is good. But what the local authority have said is that they still will need to assess him when we get down there to do another statement but an English version" (Parent).*

This frustration and delay is exacerbated by the lack of a fixed address: *"The schools wouldn't take any application without a house address, and the Army doesn't give you a house address until a certain number of days out. So when I started the process in January I didn't have a house address*

so I missed the second round of applications for schools. I now have to wait until the third round, but even then, I think if you are not proactive you could just get sucked into the system and then your children go to whatever school you are dealt. And who would want that for their kids? I didn't want to get posted and then try and find a school. I know there's a couple of military parents and they are leaving it down to the local council to find them a school, but when your child has special needs you can't leave that to chance" (Parent).

There are certain mitigation factors when it comes to the timing of moves. Postings can be delayed and influenced, especially around examination time, to ensure the best for the pupils: *"Army families have the right to refuse a move if children are facing external public examinations, or where the support can't be replicated elsewhere - like specialist support - but it is very rare unless the issue is very complex to refuse for the second reason"* (Stakeholder organisation).

PERCEIVED STIGMA

It was suggested that there are certain disincentives in respect of whether ALN are always identified when parents move postings. Sometimes parents choose not to take their children to postings where there isn't good support for ALN. However, others don't always disclose their needs on transition, and some parents chose to split the family for extended periods – neither circumstance is good for the pupils:

"AGAI 108 allows soldiers to put a SEN of a child on the soldier's career path. This means that postings can take account of the SEN needs of the children – it can mean that you don't get posted to certain places because these can't support the educational needs of the child" (Stakeholder organisation).

"I have come across this a few times where there does seem to be a stigma attached to military children with SEN if parents are moving on to their next posting. That is an issue especially in overseas postings – parents can become very anxious if their child is on the SEN register. I've had conversations with parents where they've said that they won't be posted if their child has got learning needs. I do know that we had a family within the last school year where the father became very anxious because he thought this would stall his career because both of his children were on the special needs register and that was quite a difficult situation for the family. I have come across that a few times" (Stakeholder organisation).

On moving to a new school, some parents can be very reluctant to share their child's information about ALN/SLN. One reason given by parents for this is that they do not want their child labelled or "taken out" of anything, feeling that there are enough disadvantages to moving around so frequently without the "stigma" of ALN accompanying them. Any delay in receiving information from parents can lead to a delay in the provision of support for the child. Some children transfer to new schools from being home schooled by a parent, and obviously in these circumstances, no formal assessment of need will have been undertaken. These concerns are often borne out of broader issues as to whether there is an advantage in being known as a Service child:

"Not every parent wants it to be known that they are military. Speaking to another parent the other day she said 'it's nice in this school that they don't want it to be a big thing that we are

military'. We want them to be part of their community and not have barriers in the way to achieving that" (Parent)

"In Wales we don't have the Service Pupil Premium whereas in England they will get extra money for the military pupil. But here there's no real benefit for them to say that they are a military family. So some parents don't want it to be known and we also have the issue that some parents have decided that this is the place they are going to settle down. That means that the person who is in the military will work away from home, so essentially the parent who is left behind is just part of the community. It is only if they say they have a military background that we know" (Senior teacher).

COMMUNICATION

Parents reflected that there are a number of issues connected with the communication between them and the local authorities and schools that potentially could be improved. First and foremost, among these was the need to receive feedback, so that there are no gaps in the conversation: *"The communication needs to be far more robust. After you submit paperwork it would be good to receive confirmation that a) they've received the information; they have everything they need; b) they've reviewed your child's situation and support needs and have put arrangements in place or are in the process of making arrangements; c) there is a place for your child and we look forward to welcoming you"* (Parent).

The role of social media and informal networks of communication and 'intelligence' within Service families on how good schools are for children with ALN is increasingly important:

"Access to the right school in the first place is the most important thing – parents are quite savvy at making judgements about what's the right learning environment for them and often Army families can't always get access to school places for their children. Some schools are better than others at being suitable for identifying SEN and supporting families, and getting into those schools is crucial" (Stakeholder organisation).

"It's all done on Facebook now. Parents speaking to parents – 'oh, I recommend this school…this is a good house for you to live in…' So actually whilst the local army unit will know the solider they won't necessarily know the family that has come with them" (Parent).

IMPACT OF DIFFERENT EDUCATION SYSTEMS

It is important to recognise that Service children are operating in an inter- and intra-national context. Parents reported that changes in posting typically will mean that the Service family will have to cross national boundaries – it is extremely rare for those currently living in Wales to move within the country, and for the vast majority, their next move will be outside of Wales into a different educational administration. The devolution of education to the nations (and to the National Assembly in Wales) has increased the impact of moving on families. Each of the UK nations has a distinct and different approach to curriculum and to provision, as obviously do those overseas, and for families who are crossing these administrative boundaries relatively frequently, these differences are significant. They are especially significant when it comes to children with

SEN/ALN as parents report that the thresholds for assessing and determining support vary, as does the actual provision. Particularly, the non-portability of assessments, especially for those children with moderate need, is an identified issue especially as these families are often moving:

"Some Services families are very on the ball, but every nation, LA and school works differently. Most of our pupils will come from England, Scotland or Germany. When these come into Wales it means that there are new rules and regulations for them to deal with that the devolved administrations have all put in place which makes things difficult" (School staff member).

"The challenge is always that the people who have been providing the support will inevitably change when you move, and this also resets the process of assessment. Often children will have the wrong paperwork, and the four UK nations do not recognise each other's assessments. On average it takes around 20 weeks for an assessment to be made, assuming that everything goes smoothly, and all too often there are a whole series of delays. The reason that some local authorities give for needing to redo the assessment is that a new team will be providing support and they want to build a new relationship with the children. From the point of view of Service families, they'd rather forgo an elongated assessment process for speedier access to support" (Stakeholder organisation).

"The biggest issue in respect of SEN is about moving between nations. In an ideal world we would have families saying to schools they are about to move to 'this is the support that we have now which has been assessed by professionals for our child with SEN, can we have this same support when we move to you?' and the new school would say 'send us the documentation and we'll put all the necessary arrangements in place'" (Senior teacher).

For some families where the need is at a lower level, they feel that their lives are a constant fight. This is exacerbated when they move schools because on arrival new schools can be rather wary of adopting packages of support for children on the "recommendation" of the family/parent, or indeed on the information that is provided by the sending school. It was suggested that in no small part this is because there is wide variation in what sending and receiving schools send and receive (more of this below): *"Communication between schools is key so that the leaving school feels like it can be completely honest with the receiving school"* (Teacher/Learning Support Assistant). The frequency of moves is also a factor here:

"These children are never in places long enough for appropriate assessments to be made – they fall between the cracks of the assessments. Pupils with higher levels of need are often less transitory – it's the ones with lower levels of need that often miss out. Those pupils below the threshold of having a statement don't always get the same level of support from one school to another. That isn't necessarily because the new school doesn't want to support the child, but they may not have the same level of resources available" (Stakeholder organisation).

"The more specialist the issue and the more complex, the more likely it is that assessments will be portable. But for lower-level, more classroom-based issues like dyslexia, teachers are much more likely to say that they want to assess them over a period of time before they make a decision about the support needed" (Senior teacher).

There are also problems in respect of legal statements and suggestions that they don't even travel: *"A statement is a legal document and having one can act as a barrier to the family for moving around – there is also some stigma attached to it" (Stakeholder organisation).* It was also suggested that the reason portability is an issue relates to differences in documentation:

> *"When our children come to us they often haven't brought the information with need with them. We find that when our children go to England, there is a checklist, and we don't have that in Wales. Schools from England ring up and you speak to them, and they ask whether anybody can send the check-list. Now, we don't have that, but it's a massive thing in England because of the Service Pupil Premium, and that's massive, it's very different in Wales, so different to England. Sometimes you get children come in, and the things they've done are very different – the paperwork that we get is very different to the paperwork we send to England and they probably say the same thing about us. The impression I have is that the way they learn is quite structured, and the children who do well do very well, but the children who don't seem to struggle. That's my experience" (Teacher/Learning Support Assistant).*

ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES FACING SERVICE CHILDREN WITH ALN

It is certainly perceived by many that the additional impact of being in a Service family means that there is a real difference between Service children with ALN and those non-service children with ALN:

> *"The ALN/SEN is additional to the fact that Service children are emotionally disadvantaged when compared to non-service children – there are other SEN which matter, their special emotional needs. There is a much more challenging home life for Service children than for the vast majority of non-service children" (Stakeholder organisation).*

> *"I think it's the same with any family. I think some families value education and they would support their child in any way they could and some don't. Basically kids succeed or fail because of their families not because of what we do its actually what happens at home. Army families are no different. You might have an army family whose mum is interested, but there are families that don't really value their education and that's the same the world over, it is not just an army issue. It's just your mind set in terms of how much you value education" (Teacher/Learning Support Assistant).*

Emotional well-being and challenge is greater for Service children, especially those with ALN: *"There are always going to be attachment issues for these children – one of our ALN pupils had been through nine primaries before coming to us" (Senior teacher).* The flipside of this is the positive that Service children are often very independent and resilient learners: *"I see in these pupils some very resilient children and because we are a Key Stage 2 school often these children will have had two or three moves by the time they get to us. They've almost developed a resilience by the time they get to us. They're amazing children to be honest, as an adult we would struggle with that lifestyle and we're expecting these young people to do it and pick up and run as normal" (Teacher/Learning Support Assistant).* Overall though, from a variety of points of view, there is little difference between pupils with ALN and SEN in classroom terms, regardless of whether they

are Service children or not:

"I strongly feel is that with the appropriate resources it would be amazing to have somebody designated to nurture them but class teachers struggle to give that time. But if you are in a classroom where you've got general special needs children – whether local children or military children and we've got support already established and then a child comes in who needs that support, we often don't have that extra facility and I find that really frustrating" (Teacher/Learning Support Assistant).

"Early intervention when any child moves could really make a difference, and I think that would make a difference to how the child performs long term but also the short term, whether they are a Service child or not. We are quite used to these children coming in and generally I think we do a good job, and there's much more that unites Service children and non-service children with additional needs than divides them" (Senior teacher).

RELATIONSHIPS AND SHARING INFORMATION

BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

There are a set of important relationships at the heart of the issues pertaining to Service children and their experience of moving around: between sending and receiving schools; within and between local schools; between schools and local authorities; and perhaps most importantly of all, between schools and families.

There is a disconnect between local schools' data collection, and that of the LA, especially around admissions processes. Some local authorities have a field in their application forms which asks whether the applying family is a Service family or not, but this form is not used in a uniform manner across Wales. In addition to this, it was suggested that the way in which admissions data is shared between local authorities and schools is sub-optimal:

"We could have a message from the local authority with a mid-term application. On that form there is a tick box to say that they are military, but it's up to them whether they actually tick the box, and in Wales there's no financial incentive for them to tick the box" (School staff member).

"We don't control our admissions, county control our admissions. They basically look if we've got room. Families get given a space and then the transfer of documents is very much dependent on the school that sends them. They send them and some of the schools that we get children from are very big schools, some of our families come from are huge schools. We are seeing MoD children come in like wild fire. I think lots of our parents come to us say they don't want to leave because it was so different…the experience was so much more positive" (Senior teacher).

There are large gaps in the extant relevant data in Wales, and it is hard to find accurate data on Service children. As acknowledged by the first of the two questions above, it is perceived to be much easier to track Service children in England as the incentive of the Service Pupil Premium

means that families are keen to identify themselves, as are schools.

BETWEEN SCHOOLS

In many ways, the key professional interface for Service children is between the sending and receiving schools. There are clearly examples of excellent practice that can be found: *"Some of the best information we get is from Brunei. They seem to be a lot more holistic and they send us things like their photographs of when they first started school which are lovely. It's a really good start even though it's not a massive indication of their academic ability it says a lot about them and tells their story. We don't have anything like that" (Teacher/Learning Support Assistant).*

More negatively however, the typical experience of transitioning information between schools is much more patchy:

"We get their books, the results of tests and all the rest of it the child has done. It doesn't tell you about them, although it touches on academic ability. It doesn't talk about the child, what they like, what their fears are in school, how best teaching staff can support them and what strategies are in place, what language they speak, what to call them. I don't think I've had anything from any of the schools which told me about the child" (Teacher/Learning Support Assistant).

"It varies. We've had children arriving months before their files and because it goes through the local authority, the local authority them straight away but then we might find out later that they are Army. If they are ALN, quite often there is nothing on our SIMS system. They can go undetected for quite a while which is very difficult because that's when behavioural problems can arise, and parents are not always forthcoming because who wants to tell you that their child is a problem?" (Teacher/Learning Support Assistant)

"If records come through – quite often they do, but quite often they don't – we obviously start with the records. Essentially this is quite a difficult situation I find because the child can come in and can present as having some sort of difficulty in the classroom but we have to err on the side of caution because this could just be a gap in knowledge. If you can track back how many times that child has moved before, it may just be that they have never ever come across those concepts before. Taking a very simplistic example, a child came to us with three previous schools and had a lot of experience with addition and subtraction but they'd never touched on division. I'm thinking as a teacher 'they can't do this' but it's not that, it's just that they've not had exposure to it. We have to be very careful when we work with the children and they present with difficulties. We can't say instantly say this is an ALN problem as it's not always the case. Sometimes it is sometimes it isn't and it takes us time to actually work out what the issue is" (Teacher/Learning Support Assistant).

Central to when this process works well is when there is a relationship of trust between the sending and the receiving school. This can be developed when there is time and capacity to make phone calls and to write emails, but all too often this time is at a premium, which is where the role of the liaison officer comes into play:

"Some schools are brilliant when you speak to them face to face. In all fairness schools are stretched to the limit. You try and get hold of the year head, but when you are trying to contact someone all too often you are missing each other all the time. They'll phone, I'm wandering around the school. I phone back and if I'm lucky I can get them. Sometimes people are nervous about writing things down but they'll be happy to have a conversation with you. Communication between schools is key so that the leaving school feels like it can be completely honest with the receiving school" (School staff member).

Ultimately though, it is the primacy of the receiving school that matters – this is where the decisions are taken about SEN/ALN: *"Essentially we always make our own mind up, that's really key but that's not to say we don't take on board anything that is in that documentation. We have to address what's presented to us but we come to our own decision about what's best for the benefit of the child"* (Senior teacher).

ROLE OF LIAISON OFFICERS

As touched on above, crucial to building effective liaison locally between school and Service families in clusters has been the work of funded liaison posts – where such posts exist, transition for Service children is reported to be much more effective. However, there are threats to such posts due to reductions in funding and uncertainty about changes to ALN financing: *"It comes down to money basically. Yes, you want the role to be able to educate those children to the best of their needs and the high school at the top has all these little branches, but will it have to bring in additional resources to carry on with the liaison role. Could they be funded on a regional basis?"* (Headteacher).

The role was described by one liaison officer as follows: *"My role is to be the link between the family and the school. You can never plan for the amount of time that people will be here – they often come and go at very short notice. We try and help as much as possible with the transition and that is based on getting as much information as possible from schools and families"* (School staff member). The perception of teaching staff of these sorts of roles was universally positive: *"Having the role has made a huge difference – it should be a given for schools in areas like ours. The role is to reduce the gaps in knowledge that inevitably come up when working in this area – she mitigates the risk"* (Senior teacher). Key to the successful deployment of the job was a 'sixth sense' that was described:

"I know the military, so I know where they are going to be coming from. If I get an impression that they are military I will have that conversation and I will link in with the year head. I will try and meet with them and try and get to the bottom if they are not. I get a sense for it having worked with so many military families" (School staff member).

7. AREAS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

In bringing the report to a close, Table 2 brings together the conclusions and Areas for Further Consideration against each of the key themes identified in the previous chapter.

Table 2 – Conclusions and Areas for Further Consideration

Theme	Concluding comments	Areas for Further Consideration
EXPERIENCE OF MILITARY CHILDREN IN TRANSITION	Frequent transition results in Service children having interrupted experiences of education. Although Service children often develop an inner resilience in response to this, the lack of stability and consistency can have negative impacts both generally and specifically for those with Additional Learning Needs. Evidence collected during interviews with practitioners and families suggests that transition processes can result in learners' additional needs being missed, particularly for those pupils with mild / less complex needs. Several factors can contribute to this, a combination of behavioural and systemic factors: – Learners themselves 'masking' their additional needs over time and being accustomed to coping without additional support; – Weaknesses in information-sharing between schools and local authorities; – A systemic failing, where the progress of Service children is not monitored sufficiently closely over a sustained period of time (in a single or multiple settings, and linked to transition) in order to identify and address Additional Learning Needs. Positively, the Draft Code of Practice for Additional Learning Needs[9] refers to the specific issues linked to the service-induced mobility of Service children. The key will be to ensure that appropriate guidance and training is in place for all relevant practitioners. Evidence collected as part of this research serves to reinforce the need for local authorities and schools to ensure that appropriate (and where necessary additional) assessment, intervention and provision is in place	1. **Ensure that the move towards person-centred support for learners is given specific attention in respect of the children of Service personnel.**

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[9]
http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s59527/Draft%20Additional%20Learning%20Needs%20Code%20February%202017.pdf

Theme	Concluding comments	Areas for Further Consideration
	to support Service children. Furthermore, local authorities and schools should also take account of the additional emotional difficulties and needs that can be linked to the deployment of Service families – anxiety, stress and disengagement. The central ethos of Person Centred Practice, which is embedded within the Act, provides opportunities to address this. It will be essential that ALNCos are able to access appropriate guidance and training to ensure they are aware of the particular difficulties and issues that may present themselves among the children of Service personnel.	
IMPACT OF DIFFERENT EDUCATION SYSTEMS	The fact that Service families frequently access support in different education systems can present confusion, particularly as these education systems have evolved in the post-devolution era. Transitioning from one system to another can slow down or interrupt identification and assessment processes or lead to delays in learners accessing more specialist support. The key to moving towards more seamless transition between regions and nations of the UK and overseas is communication between key professionals and the ability to use prior evidence / assessment data in an efficient way. This concerns making available Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans in England, statements in Northern Ireland, and Co-ordinate Support Plans in Scotland when assessing appropriate provision for Service children with ALN.	2. **Ensuring that information sharing protocols are in place between relevant agencies so that evidence linked to each of the nations' data can safely and effectively be shared.**
ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES FACING SERVICE CHILDREN WITH ALN	There are specific and additional challenges that many Service children with ALN face. These may be linked to the anxiety and emotional difficulties caused by repeat transition or the deployment of serving parents to operational/combat areas. This requires that schools – through ALNCos and/or other staff – plan their programme of pastoral support in a way that takes account of the needs of this particular population. Parents report that good relationships between schools (especially those with liaison officers) and Family Welfare Offices on military bases can help identify issues or circumstances that could trigger emotional challenges early, thereby ensuring that additional emotional support can be put in place, if necessary.	3. **Review whether the needs of all Service children (including their additional emotional needs) are being effectively supported in the current process.**

Theme	Concluding comments	Areas for Further Consideration
RELATIONSHIPS AND SHARING INFORMATION	Moving towards a more streamlined transition experience for Service children with ALN requires clear, timely and effective information sharing between partners. The three key stakeholders – local authorities, sending and receiving schools, and families themselves – currently work sub-optimally in this process. Notwithstanding the differences of the educational administrations from which Service children are moving, individual schools and local authorities have it within their gift to work in a more systematic and standardised manner to ensure that the transition between schools is more efficient. For example, all Welsh local authorities could collect data on whether those who are applying for school places are Service families. To expedite this requires time and trust to build between schools, and for professionals to think more critically about the impact on Service children if information is not shared positively and openly.	4. **Work towards a consistent all-Wales approach to collecting admissions data on all Service families which is shared with schools. This should involve new fields on PLASC, and creating links between local authority admissions data and school-level data.** 5. **Consider ways in which school-to-school transfer can be improved to the benefit of Service children.**
ROLE OF LIAISON OFFICERS	There are a number of challenges facing Service children in transition. Our study has pointed to a number of ways – *inter alia* effecting a 'better' transition, chasing data on ALN, connecting with families, networking within school clusters – that liaison officers (where they exist) aid and support Service children to be visible and settle into new schools.	6. **Review the sustainability of liaison officer roles, and consider the unintended negative impact that their removal might have.**

APPENDIX 1 – DATA PROFORMA TO SCHOOLS

RESEARCH ON EXPERIENCES OF SERVICE FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN WITH ALN IN WALES

DATA TEMPLATE FOR REQUESTING DATA ON SERVICE CHILDREN WITH SEN/ALN

Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care, University of South Wales · September 2017

INTRODUCTION

Working in partnership with Arad Research (experts in education research in Wales) the Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care (WIHSC), University of South Wales has been commissioned by Supporting Service Children in Education (SSCE) Cymru to explore the experiences of Service families with children who have Special Educational Needs/Additional Learning Needs (SEN/ALN). The study will be looking to achieve three key things between now and February 2018:

1. Review and compile data on the number of Service children with SEN/ALN in Wales, and compare with the UK data
2. Research the experiences of families and stakeholders in respect of supporting Service children with SEN/ALN
3. Identify the implications of the research in practice, in the context of the Welsh ALN Bill

ABOUT THIS DATA TEMPLATE

This tool has been devised to address the first objective above. For your school, we'd like you to please complete the two tables as fully as possible, **BASED ON THE SITUATION AS IT CURRENTLY STANDS IN YOUR SCHOOL**.

We hope that the request for data is clear but if you have questions at please contact Jenny Hilgart at WIHSC by e-mail at jennifer.hilgart@southwales.ac.uk or by telephone on 01443 483070.

IN ADDITION TO FILLING IN THE TOOL, PLEASE TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL

Name of school

Local authority area

Primary or secondary

Date of completion

TOTAL NUMBER OF SERVICE CHILDREN, BY YEAR – Academic Year 2017-18

School year	Total number of Service children in the school (as on the date of completion)
TOTAL	

TOTAL NUMBER OF PUPILS WITH SEN, BY TYPE OF PROVISION AND TOTAL NUMBER OF SERVICE CHILDREN IN THE SCHOOL WITH SEN, BY TYPE OF PROVISION AND YEAR GROUP – Academic Year 2017-18

School year	Statemented		School Action Plus		School Action	
	All pupils	Service children	All pupils	Service children	All pupils	Service children
TOTAL						