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Mr S Mason
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Mason

Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: the quality and impact of partnership provision in schools for children in service families

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 16 September 2010 to look at the school's contribution to the quality of provision and partnerships for children and young people who are in families of service personnel.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of partnerships, including the quality of the partnerships between schools and agencies and between schools and parents, I looked at how effective the partnerships are in improving children and young people's personal well-being and learning. I also considered the nature of the support given to these children, including those in the most vulnerable circumstances, or those who have a particular special educational need or disability, and the arrangements to ensure the continuity of provision during children's move in and out of your school.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: discussions with you and members of your staff, representatives of partner agencies, the Unit Welfare Officer from the 4th Regiment Royal Artillery, children and young people from service families and, separately, with service parents. I also looked at a range of documentation provided by the school.

The school's contribution to the quality of provision and partnerships for children and young people who are in families of service personnel is good with outstanding features.

Key features

- The school provides for students from service families based at the Alanbrooke Barracks. It has enjoyed a stable relationship with the 4th Regiment over several years. Numbers of service students within the school are relatively small when compared with the total number of students. Currently, there are 60 students from service families and approximately 1,100 students in total. Students from service backgrounds therefore represent about one in every 20 students.
- The school has identified service students as a discrete group for many years. Their attendance, progress and extra-curricular participation has been more explicitly analysed over the last two years. Their academic progress and well-being are monitored separately. Monitoring is frequent, taking place six times during the year. The monitoring process includes the service students who are placed on the special educational needs register. Information from rigorous monitoring exercises is used effectively to trigger intervention when required.
- Individual year cohorts of service students are of very small size and are therefore not amenable to meaningful statistical analysis. For most purposes, the school treats service students as individuals and this is how they wish to be treated. However, because the school collects data for service students as a group, you were able to report with confidence that for the current Year 11, for example, the attainment and progress of service students is in line with that of non-service students.
- The school makes excellent provision to promote service students' personal development and well-being. Your pastoral team's high-quality work on inclusion for all students is recognised by the local authority. Staff have developed an expert understanding of the additional stresses experienced at times by service students and their families. Communication between staff on behalf of service students is highly organised and effective. Staff work extremely productively with the Army through the office of the Unit Welfare Officer.
- A teaching assistant has special responsibility for service students. She has the confidence of service students within the school.
- Communication with soldiers on active duty in Afghanistan is a high priority for the Regiment. The school is an integrated part of the communication system and service students stay in touch with their parents by email from the school.
- In addition to the strong links with the regiment, the school has very good partnership arrangements with external agencies. The partners stress that the service community is an integral part of the local, rural community of Hambledon. Partnership working is developing well for the benefit of service children and families. The provision on the base is improving, countering the isolation service families occasionally experience when a parent is on active service.
- The local authority's extended services work closely with the school. The police, through the Safer Neighbourhood Policing initiative, and the voluntary and community sectors, through the Thirsk Clock community

youth initiative, have close and productive relationships with the school. These agencies work to prevent and resolve issues and are particularly important when service young people experience social and behavioural problems. The school, through the strength of its partnership working, is therefore well placed to support service students in the potentially stressful situations that may befall them, including the most serious.

- The majority of service students interviewed cope adequately with the social upheavals and interruptions to their learning. Many of these students had moved school four or five times, mainly within their primary school years. All of the service students regarded the frequent changes negatively. One student said 'You have to get on with it. I don't like it' to general agreement. Some students do not cope well with moves. Their progress and behaviour may suffer. For such students, the school mobilises its resources and partnerships very effectively. Young people from service families, who had rebelled and experienced considerable difficulty in managing their attitudes and behaviour, cited the unequivocal support and help they received from school staff as a key factor in their subsequent recovery.
- Service parents interviewed provided further evidence of the potentially damaging impact that frequent moves had on their children. Stability was seen as increasingly important as their children became older. They felt it became critical when their children were choosing the subjects they were to study for GCSE and into Years 10 and 11. Parents explained that at this stage some service parents put their own futures within the services on hold to enable their children an uninterrupted Key Stage 4. Service parents had no concerns over admissions to Thirsk School, but a number of them were keen to point out that this was not their previous experience.
- Service students entering the school who have been identified as having special educational needs in their previous schools are immediately placed on the school's register of special educational needs and monitoring and support begin. There is therefore no break in provision while they are re-assessed. Service students may fall within several of the discrete groups under scrutiny by managers. For example, they may receive extra attention if they enter the school during term-time, as all newcomers are monitored and supported to ensure a smooth transition.
- The school is aware of some of the Armed Forces' agencies that are responsible for the well-being of students from service families when they transfer to and within the United Kingdom, such as the Children's Education Advisory Service (CEAS). Senior staff have regard for their policy, guidance and advice. However, the school sees the critical relationship as that which it has developed with the Regiment. In particular, it attributes its current very good relationship to its partnership and links with the Unit Welfare Officer and his staff.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop the work with children and young people and their parents who are in families of service personnel.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Brian Padgett
Her Majesty's Inspector