

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



6 October 2010

Mr A Lamb  
Headteacher  
Whitfield and Aspen School  
Mayfield Road  
Whitfield  
Dover  
CT16 3LJ

Dear Mr Lamb

**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, pupils and parents during my visit on 16 and 17 September 2010 to look at the school's contribution to the quality of provision and partnerships for children 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'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 and/or disability, and the arrangements to ensure the continuity of provision when the children move in or 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: meetings with you and your senior leadership team; the Special Educational Needs Coordinator; the school's admissions officer and the nursery manager. I also talked to parents and children currently and formerly associated with the school, and scrutinised school documentation, including information about pupils' progress and attendance. In addition, I held a telephone conversation with the headteacher of a partner primary school that serves a high proportion of service children.

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

## Key features

- Your school's philosophy of treating children and their families as equal but 'not necessarily the same' is central to your work. This is greatly appreciated by service families, including those from your Nepali community. They say quite clearly that your school understands their needs while not making them feel 'different'.
- The school's accurate monitoring of pupils' progress focuses sharply on identifying underachievement among individual pupils and vulnerable groups. This means that interventions, such as additional support for reading and writing, are targeted and successful.
- School data indicate that the achievements of children from service families are consistently in line with their peers. By the end of their time in the school, which may not be the end of a key stage, most have made good progress. Often this rate of progress increases rapidly after the initial period in which children settle into the school.
- The attendance of service children is also in line with their peers. Overall, their attendance is broadly average. However, this figure includes some authorised absences for compassionate reasons, such as holidays taken when parents return from tours of duty. The attendance of the majority, therefore, is consistently above average and often high.
- Service children in your school are polite, hardworking and often resilient, in spite of their very numerous moves between schools in England and abroad. Although they say they sometimes feel 'sad' or anxious when parents are deployed on active service, they appreciate the help provided by school staff, friends and their families. Parents say that while frequent moves between schools are unsettling, children often develop a better understanding of the world and its diversity.
- All staff play a vital role in making children and their families feel welcome, particularly at times of transition or transfer. In many instances, this has been the key factor in supporting parents to integrate quickly and successfully into the local and school communities while enabling children to make good progress in their learning and well-being. You are aware that on a very small number of occasions this has not been as successful and are currently reviewing your 'front of house' procedures.
- Admissions procedures run very smoothly. Your team provides clear information and supports parents to complete admission forms. On occasions, you have made specific arrangements so that siblings can stay together and have responded flexibly when families who are relocating do not yet have a permanent address.
- Your school has very effective systems to assess children and identify their specific educational needs. However, you and your service parents recognise that the effectiveness of the transfer of pupils' records from other schools is highly variable. Information often takes a long time to arrive in spite of your staff chasing it. In some instances, records do not contain the necessary information about pupils' attainment or special educational needs. This can delay referrals and, subsequently, the additional support that children need. You and your service parents find

this frustrating, particularly as many families relocate within an 18-month period.

- You work very successfully with a range of external agencies and have close partnerships with other schools in the area who also have service children. You found it particularly valuable to attend a recent conference that focused on supporting service families leading up to a major regimental deployment. Partnerships with local authority officers who have specific responsibilities for service children and liaison with service personnel responsible for service family welfare are less well developed. In spite of your best efforts, it has been difficult at times to make contact with the person best placed to deal with your questions and provide information.
- You offer a range of extended services that is tailored to the needs of service families and their children. The very successful E-Blueys Club offers children the opportunity to communicate with their parents who are serving abroad and allows teachers to pass on regular information about the children's progress and well-being. You have also organised English classes for mothers who wish to develop their language skills. This has supported parents who sometimes feel isolated to meet and engage with the school community and develop their confidence. As a response to their feedback, you are now considering the use of a crèche to support parents who have younger children to attend courses.
- Your staff are well trained. They use a range of counselling skills sensitively and have been trained to deal with bereavement within the wider context of working with all children. This, with strong safeguarding procedures, means that service children are well cared for and kept safe.
- You and your team are open and critically reflective. You evaluate all aspects of the school's work very thoroughly, drawing on the views of parents and children. Consequently, you have already identified astutely a number of areas where your work with service families can be improved further. This includes, for example, reviewing the school prospectus and welcome pack and strengthening the role of governors to better include transient groups, which may include parents from service families.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop the work with children 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

**Chris Wood**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**