

**SUPPORT FOR PUPILS AND FAMILIES FROM ARMED FORCES SERVICE
BACKGROUNDS**

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to detail for committee members the range of initiatives in Argyll and Bute to support our children and young people and families from Armed Forces service backgrounds. The report details the funding sources on which such support relies, the ways in which such funding is directed within Argyll and Bute, and describes the variety of approaches employed to ensure the welfare of pupils from service backgrounds and their families.

1.2 It is recommended that the Community Services Committee:

- a) Considers the support in place for young people and their families from a service family background.
- b) Notes the change to the Education Support Fund for session 2023-24 and that feedback will be received on the current bid in January 2023.

SUPPORT FOR PUPILS AND FAMILIES FROM ARMED FORCES SERVICE BACKGROUNDS

2.0 INTRODUCTION**2.1 Armed Forces Context within Helensburgh and Lomond**

His Majesty's Naval Base (HMNB) Clyde, at Faslane, is a major local employer for both civilian and service personnel and has a direct impact on the number of service children currently enrolled within Helensburgh and Lomond Schools.

HMNB Clyde is home to the United Kingdom's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent and the Astute Class submarines. However, it is also the base port for the First Mine Countermeasure Squadron (MCM1), the Faslane Patrol Boat Squadron (FPBS), the Royal Marine's 43 Commando Fleet Protection Group and the Northern Diving Group (NDG). It has significant numbers of Armed Forces personnel involved in training, engineering support, personnel support, administration and medical roles.

The ships, submarines and support organisations and their differing roles means that there is a constant cycle of, often unpredictable, deployment patterns. Depending upon the particular role being conducted, there can be times when contact between Service personnel and their families is extremely limited, often for extended periods.

Our service children and young people often experience situations and challenges that their civilian counterparts may not. Particularly, coping without a parent during deployments can have an impact upon children from Armed Forces families.

Mobility within the services may also mean that children change schools and geographical locations more frequently, adding extra pressures. Education, from early years through to higher education, can provide the stability to help children and young people through these times.

Figures show that Helensburgh and Lomond have approximately 680 armed forces children and young people in primary and secondary schools. This figure is based on families who have declared to their school that they are from an Armed Forces background.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is recommended that the Community Services Committee:

- a) Considers the support in place for young people and their families for service family background.
- b) Notes the change to the education support fund for session 2023-24 and that feedback will be received on the current bid in January 2023.

4.0 DETAIL

4.1 Ministry of Defence Education Support Fund

Following networked support from the Argyll and Bute Armed Forces Community Partnership and direct endorsement from HMNB Clyde, funding was successfully gained from the National MOD Education Support Fund to support the work of the Education Service and the provision for our service families.

The funding is awarded annually and most recently in January 2022 for use in session 2022-23. The fund is used to fully support the employment of our Service Pupil Adviser and also contributes to the provision of a Pupil Support Teacher, who is utilised across our local primary schools to support our young people from a service family background.

This year the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust has partnered with the MOD to administer the MOD Education Support Fund (ESF). This programme continues to provide funding to help mitigate the effects of exceptional mobility and/or separation faced by service children.

This is the first year that the ESF has been made through the Armed Forces Covenant Fund and feedback is expected on our bid in January 2023.

4.2 Service Family Liaison

Teaching staff in Helensburgh and Lomond are aware of the issues faced by children from Armed Forces families through training opportunities and their close links to the community.

Staff support our young people in their new learning community, help them settle in, ensure that they continue to learn and also identify and support pupils who have gaps in their learning that have arisen from moving between different education systems.

Staff provide pastoral and emotional support to pupils who may be affected by the deployment of a parent or carer.

4.3 **Service Pupil Advisor**

The Service Pupil Advisor is a unique role created by Argyll and Bute Council to provide advice and support for the large numbers of Armed Forces children in the Helensburgh and Lomond area. This post is funded by the MOD Education Support Fund. The Senior Pupil Advisor's role is to act as a key contact and point of reference for Armed Forces families and to co-ordinate additional support for service children with a particular focus on gaps in learning as a result of deployment and/or mobility.

4.4 **Support for Young People in Early Years and Primary School**

Story Sacks have been established as an Argyll and Bute initiative to provide books to families that will support discussions with their young person about any anxiety and worries they might have about mobility or deployment. Our Story Sacks contains specific texts that give a platform for families to look together at a parent being deployed, moving house, starting a new school, friendships and bereavement.

We currently have approximately 80 story sacks that can be found in Primary Schools and Nurseries in Helensburgh and Lomond and also in the Drumfork Community Centre and in Community Houses. Families can request to borrow a Story Sack at any time.

In partnership with Reading Force, we provide all pre-schools and nurseries attended by Armed Forces and veterans' children with bright yellow Early Years bags. These contain a scrapbook, age-appropriate picture books, a Storytime magazine, a bookmark and a 'Sharing Stories and Bonding Over Books' booklet with tips for parents and carers for sharing books with babies, toddlers and young children.

Forces and Me Clubs are available in two of Primary Schools as follows:-

- Hermitage Primary run 2 groups: P3 and P4 on a Tuesday (10 children) and P5 – P7 on a Wednesday (15 children).
- John Logie Baird Primary have an afterschool club on a Wednesday open to all classes (25 children).

4.5 **Support for Young People within Secondary Education**

Forces Children Scotland has received funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust to deliver Your Mind Matters. This is a project which is working directly with young people from serving and veteran families, to co-provide mental health and wellbeing digital and face-to-face services.

From the funding, Hermitage Academy was awarded a Wellbeing Worker who took up post in January 2022. The post-holder has responsibility for engaging

and connecting with our children and young people from serving, reservist and veteran backgrounds, and also offers support to their wider families to overcome unique challenges to mental health and wellbeing.

Secondary pupils are also supported through the Forces and Me Lunchtime Club at Hermitage Academy on a Monday and Friday with approximately 20 young people attending each session. This club is primarily for young people from an armed forces background that attend Hermitage Academy, however any young person from S1 to S6 can join. The club offers a safe space to make friends with other young people who experience the different challenges surrounding mobility or deployment and gives them the opportunity learn from and share in the experience of others.

4.6 **Seasons for Growth**

Seasons for Growth is an educational support programme which aims to promote social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people coping with significant loss, separation and change in their lives. Our Service Pupil Adviser coordinates and delivers this service for our school communities in partnership with Argyll and Bute Education services.

Due to COVID 19 some sessions were not able to take place from March 2020 – October 2021. Figures for current and previous years are as follows:

2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2021-2022	2022-2023
40 pupils	47 pupils	23 pupils	15 pupils	15 pupils
7 groups	8 groups	5 groups	4 groups	4 groups
6 schools	5 schools	4 schools	4 schools	3 schools

4.7 **Area-Wide Seasons Reconnector**

40 young people and 11 Companions from the following schools attended this reconnector event: Colgrain Primary, Hermitage Academy, Hermitage Primary, John Logie Baird Primary and Rhu Primary School.



The aim of the Reconnector was to assist participants to express their views, thoughts and feelings, improve their emotional wellbeing and give them opportunities to develop further social and support networks.

Feedback from the Young People

“It reminded me that there are still people there for me.”

“It is fine to be worried.”

“That Seasons for Growth helped me.”

“I know that life has changes,”

Feedback from Companions

“Very beneficial because everybody made an effort to talk to people from other schools.”

“I felt it went very well – I assisted as a new companion with a group I had not taught and was pleased to see how much it had impacted on them and how they reconnected.”

“Very beneficial, I think that they got a lot out of it.”

4.8 Professional Learning Community (PLC)

This group consists of staff from primary and secondary schools along with third sector staff and representatives of the armed forces community. The group meets five times a year with the collective aim to understand the practical, emotional, educational and social challenges children and young people may face as a result of deployment or mobility.

Partners include: Health Professionals, Naval Families Federation, MOD staff, RN FPS Team, ADES, Argyll and Bute Early Years Team, West Dunbartonshire Council and various charities such as Forces Children Scotland and Reading Force.

During COVID 19 the meetings took place online but recently the PLC has returned to face to face meetings at the Drumfork Community Centre where an average of 23 partners attend to support our Armed Forces families.



Feedback from PLC Meetings

“Enjoyed the ability to see what various initiatives were going on in the area to support our Service Children and families. Also the ability to network and opportunities to collaborate with others to improve support.”

“I liked putting faces to names. It was always interesting listening to Emer’s and Carols reports of the things they had been doing.”

“I have learned and passed on useful information to parents and found out about different clubs that could support them.”

“Overall, the meeting for me was excellent as I got to meet a few new faces and give information to people who needed it. I thought the casual flow and allowing people to mingle was ideal and is exactly what's needed.”

4.9 Celebrating our Service Family Community

In June, a number of the Schools across Helensburgh and Lomond celebrated Armed Forces Day by carrying out a Salute to our Forces. This paid tribute to the Armed Forces our community by posting photographs of our young people saluting on social media.



Hermitage Academy held its first ever Armed Forces Day on Monday 27th June in recognition of the part service families play in our community. Pupils had the opportunity to visit stalls and activities that were supported by a large number of partners. Young people enjoyed engaging with the MOD Police, Police Scotland, Royal Navy PT Instructors, HMS Neptune Medical staff, Royal Navy Bomb Squad, Forces for Children Scotland and the Army Cadets.



4.10 Senior Phase Curricular Pathways - Cadets

In partnership with The Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association for the Lowlands of Scotland, Hermitage Academy will be introducing a Cadets Battalion into the curriculum of the school in May 2023. This will help to increase the breadth and depth of course options for our young people who may wish to consider this area as a career pathway.

4.11 Individualised Support for Parents and Carers

Drop-in support sessions with our Service Pupil Adviser are available to all our service families. The sessions, at the family centre in Churchill Square, Helensburgh, are well utilised by our families and take place every Wednesday morning from 9.00 - 12.00. Our Service Adviser offers advice and support on matters connected to education for Armed Forces families and specialises on supporting a smooth transition either to or from Scotland.

This service operates during the school term and in the past year the Service Pupil Advisor has supported 46 families through this provision. Since August 2022 there has been a steady increase in the number of families accessing the service.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 The presence of the British Armed Forces in Argyll and Bute – principally relating to the presence of HMNB Clyde at Faslane – has been a key social and economic factor in the Helensburgh and Lomond area for many years, and has contributed greatly to the area's success and prosperity. The locality's primary and secondary schools have been meeting the educational entitlements and supporting the needs of services children and young people since the base's institution. Supporting the welfare of pupils from Armed

Forces backgrounds is an ongoing priority for Argyll and Bute Council, and the funding detailed in the first part of this report enables a range of effective strategies and actions to be employed to ensure that the pupils from service backgrounds are supported to cope with and overcome the unique challenges their circumstances create.

- 5.2 The Head Teacher of Hermitage Academy is also the local authority officer with responsibility for oversight and co-ordination of the council's approaches to engaging with and supporting children and young people from Armed Forces backgrounds, and their families. This annual report to Community Services Committee will allow the aforementioned officer to report on funding, planning and implementation of activities and initiatives to ensure that children and young people from Armed Forces backgrounds continue to thrive in Argyll and Bute.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 **Policy:** Engagement with and support for children and young people from Armed Services backgrounds is a key articulation of the Scottish Governments *Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)* policy

- 6.2 **Financial:** Support and provision to children and young people from Armed Services backgrounds is dependent on continued successful applications to the MOD Education Support Fund

- 6.3 **Legal:** N.A.

- 6.4 **HR:** N.A.

- 6.5 **Fairer Scotland Duty:** N.A.

- 6.5.1 Equalities – N.A.

- 6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty – N.A.

- 6.5.3 Islands – N.A.

- 6.6 **Climate Change:** None

- 6.7 **Risk:** Failure to engage with and support children and young people from Armed Services backgrounds, and their families, appropriately could result in reduced attainment, achievement and progression into positive post-school destinations for a significant proportion of young people in the area's schools, and could be damaging to the reputation of Argyll and Bute Council.

- 6.8 **Customer Service:** N.A.

Douglas Hendry - Executive Director with responsibility for Education

Councillor Yvonne McNeilly - Policy Lead for Education

Wendy Brownlie - Head of Education – Performance and Improvement

Jennifer Crocket - Chief Education Officer/ Head of Education – Wellbeing, Inclusion and Achievement

Douglas Morgan - Head Teacher Hermitage Academy/Local Authority Officer for Support of MoD Children and Young People

Date: 15 December 2022