

Reference: FoF1

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Children, Education & Families  
Oxfordshire County Council  
County Hall  
New Road  
Oxford OX1 1ND

Kim James, Head of Service  
Learning & School Improvement

6<sup>th</sup> September, 2022

Dear Headteacher

**Re: Service Children's *Festival of Friends* Project 2022/23**

I am writing to invite your school to join an innovative school improvement project to build on and strengthen the county's collective support of our children of Armed Forces Families (Service children). I am very grateful to the financial support Armed Forces Education Trust (<https://armedforceseducation.org/>) which is making this project possible with **no requirement of costs for participating schools**.

The following provides an overview of the project along with the commitment that will be expected of schools. The project is aimed at ALL schools with at least one Service child on their rolls; those with small military children's cohorts are likely to find the project particularly valuable due to the staff training element.

If you would like your school to be included, please complete the sign-up form (copy at the end of this letter) and return it to me at [matt.blyton@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:matt.blyton@oxfordshire.gov.uk) by **Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> September**. If you have any questions, please contact me.

**What is the *Festival of Friends*?**

It is a model of collaborative, peer-supported activity for supporting Service children across Oxfordshire, in association with the city's universities. It aims to develop and share good practice, upskill teaching staff, and encourage Service children (and their parents) to consider the benefits that Further and Higher Education can have post-16.

It is aimed at ANY school, of any phase, that has Service children on its roll, but will be particularly beneficial to the many Oxfordshire schools which educate just small numbers of Armed Forces children, since these schools may not have given much focus on this potentially vulnerable group in the past. However, schools with large cohorts of Service children are also encouraged to take part to trial new national resources, run improvement projects and share their considerable expertise.

The year-long project will culminate in the actual *Festival*: a celebration and awards ceremony in July 2023 (date to be confirmed), held at a suitably special venue and aimed at participating school staff, Council and military welfare staff, some VIPs and, critically, Service children and their parents themselves. The *Festival* will also include the showcasing of some of the participating schools' improvement projects.

## How will it work?

I will provide half-termly training and support sessions for four identified **Area Service Pupil Coordinators (ASPCs)** that are linked to the county's military base locations. These four school leaders will, in turn, coordinate and chair four half-day Area Network meetings across the year (October, January, April and June), providing training and support for a nominated Service Children's Champion (SCC) from each participating school.

I am grateful to the following who will be undertaking the ASPC roles:

- Brize Norton area – Hannah Owen, senior teacher Carterton Community College
- Shrivenham area – Gemma Rogan, Faringdon Learning Trust's central team
- Bicester area - Sue Khawaja, Assistant Head at Five Acres Primary School
- Benson area – Rob Lyons, Head of House system / Services Champion, Wallingford School

## What will schools' commitment be?

Each participating school will be expected to identify someone on their staff to act as a **Service Children's Champion (SCC)** and who will attend the four above-mentioned network meetings. SCCs might be senior / middle leaders, teachers, or support staff members, depending on each school's context and staff interest. The most important consideration in identifying this person is that he / she should be able and willing to:

- Attend four network sessions (ideally ½ day release although twilight is possible).
- Disseminate key messages / training to ALL school colleagues.
- Oversee a school-based improvement project and case study this.
- Join the end of project celebration event (the *Festival*).

## What will the focus be of school-based improvement projects?

Whilst staff at the schools involved will benefit from a raised awareness of the unique challenges and needs of military families (especially because of cascaded training), we are keen that all schools involved should also improve an aspect of their provision in a sustainable way. Consequently, we will be using the Service Children's Progression (SCiP) Alliance's *Thriving Lives Toolkit* to support self-evaluation, leading to each school identifying an element of its practice in the education and welfare of Service children which would benefit from strengthening. These may be quite modest improvements; guidance will be given to SCCs by the Area Coordinators in support.

There will be flexibility in the focus of each school's improvement project. It may be aligned to one or more of the *Thriving Lives'* 7 principles, or perhaps have a focus on one of the following:

- **Welcoming ethos.** Projects aimed at growing awareness and understanding of Service families and their lifestyles amongst teachers and civilian pupils to improve Service pupils' health and wellbeing.
- **Supporting integration.** Projects aimed at developing and promoting effective practices for improving the integration of Service and civilian pupils and families, to

raise educational outcomes of the school's Service pupils. *(This may be a particularly good focus for schools with small numbers of Service children.)*

- **Promoting progression.** Projects focussed on promoting the progression of Service children e.g., from primary to secondary or into further (FE) / higher (HE) education. *(This may be a particularly good focus for participating secondary schools.)*

At the end of the project, schools will be invited to submit their project case study for consideration at an awards ceremony, although this is NOT a requirement.

### Evaluation

The funding I have secured comes with clear terms and conditions, including termly evaluation updates and an end of project report with supporting **evidence of impact**. I therefore intend to use some of the funding to publish an electronic booklet of school case studies at the end of the project.

### What to do next

- Completing the Acceptance Form and sending it to me by **Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> September**. (Separate WORD version form accompanies this letter.)
- Identify a willing school-based Service Children's Champion (SCC) and explain the project to them – they can contact me if they have any questions.
- Consider identifying a Service Children's Governor who can provide the SCC with some support and keep the Board updated.
- Publicise your involvement to the whole school community – perhaps you can use the AFET logo at the top of this letter in communications.
- Meet with your SCC after they have attended the first Area Network meeting (October) to agree your school improvement project and facilitate him / her to lead it.

Yours sincerely

Matt Blyton  
School Improvement Officer & Service children's lead (OCC)

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**Festival of Friends 2022/23  
School Acceptance form**

*Name of school:*

*Name of school's Children's Service Champion:*

*Children's Service Champion's email address & contact number:*

By signing this acceptance form to join the project, the school agrees to identify a Children's Service Champion who will:

- Attend four network sessions
- Disseminate key messages / training to ALL school colleagues
- Oversee a school-based improvement project and case study this
- Join the end of project celebration event (the *Festival*)

The school will also invite representative pupils / parents to attend the *Festival* at the end of the project.

*Signature of Headteacher:*

*Date:*

Please email the completed form to [matt.blyton@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:matt.blyton@oxfordshire.gov.uk) by **Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> September.**