

Meeting the Armed Forces Covenant Duty: The Board's role in supporting Service children

Matt Blyton 2025

Part of the Governor Services *Introduction to Governance* Series

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For school governors, trustees, academy committee members and school governance boards

Introduction

The **Armed Forces Covenant** aims to ensure that Service Personnel, their dependents and veterans are not disadvantaged in the provision of goods and services compared with the rest of the population. Its core principles were enshrined in law in the Armed Forces Act 2011.

The **Covenant Legal Duty** is a legal obligation on certain public bodies (including local authorities, governing bodies, various NHS bodies, and other organisations) to have **due regard** to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when carrying out certain functions in healthcare, education and housing. It has been in force since November 2022.

For further information, and a short explanatory film, visit [Armed Forces Covenant](#)



Why is this so important for Oxfordshire?

**2920**

Service children

**180**

Schools with Service children



Average number of Service children per school (all schools)

10**HIGH**

Average number of Service children per school with Service Children

16**HIGH**

Oxfordshire has a very large military presence with more than 11,747 military personnel (2019) and an estimated 3,500 families living and working in the county. Two-thirds of these are members of the RAF.

Oxfordshire County Council was an early signatory of the Armed Forces Covenant.

(Service Pupil Premium recipients in state-funded education provision in October 2022 school census)
www.scipalliance.org/map

Who are defined as Service children?

The generally agreed definition comes from the Service Children's Progression (SCiP) Alliance:

'A person whose parent, or carer, serves in the regular armed forces, or as a reservist, or has done at any point during the first 25 years of that person's life.'



Governors and trustees should also be aware of the Department for Education's definition used for Service Pupil Premium (SPP) eligibility:

'Reception to Y11 children with one of their parents serving in the regular armed forces or who have been registered as a 'service child' on a school census in the past 6 years.'



Service Pupil Premium

The Department for Education introduced the Service Pupil Premium (SPP) in April 2011 **in recognition of the specific challenges children from Service families face**, and as part of the commitment to delivering the Armed Forces Covenant.

SPP is additional funding for schools, to provide mainly **pastoral support**. However, it is important to note that Service Children are not a disadvantaged group in our schools, but they do have unique and special experiences and pressures.

Although SPP is not ringfenced, school leaders have a moral duty to have a clear, transparent funding strategy for their SPP – and Boards should monitor both SPP spending and evaluate its impact.

The current amount paid to each school is **£340** per eligible child (2024-2025 academic year).



Who is eligible for Service Pupil Premium?

The criteria for a child to receive SPP are:

- One of their parents is serving in the regular armed forces (including pupils with a parent who is on full commitment as part of the full-time reserve service) – and they are recorded in the Autumn school census as being a ‘Service child’.
- One of their parents is in the armed forces of another nation and is stationed in England.
- They have previously been registered as a ‘Service child’ in any school census in the last 6 years (‘ever 6 Service child’). *(Parents who are Service veterans should tell the school if they left the armed forces within the last 6 years.)*
- One of their parents died while serving in the armed forces, and the pupil receives a pension under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme or the War Pensions Scheme.

More information about SPP can be found on the Gov.UK website
[Service Pupil Premium: what you need to know - GOV.UK](#)

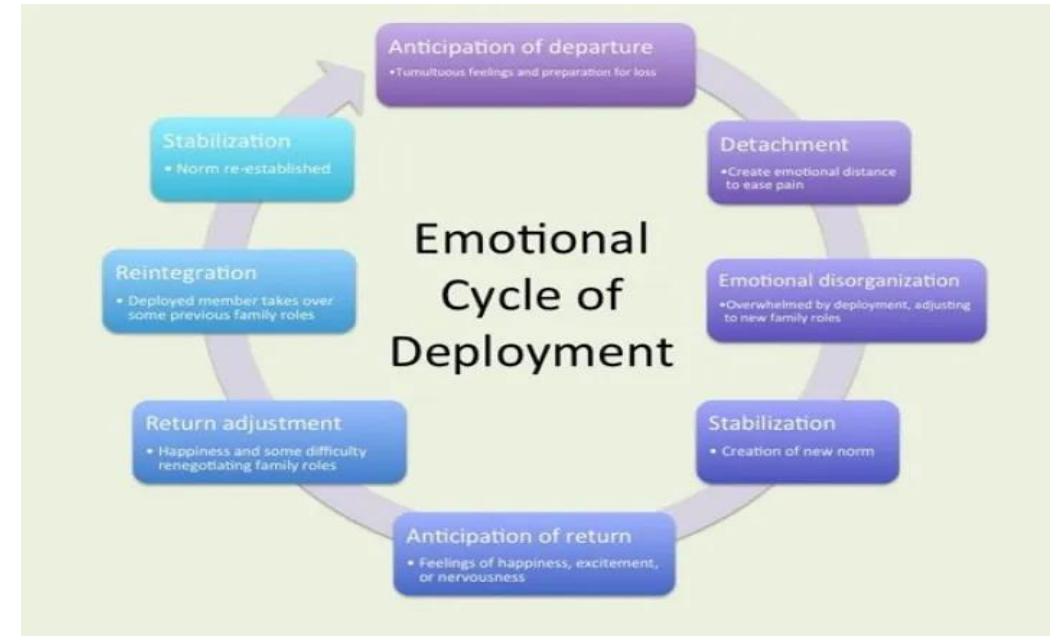


A helpful factsheet about SPP has been produced by SCISS
[Factsheets | Service Children in State Schools](#)

What specific challenges might Service children face?

More frequent school moves due to military 'postings', often in-year

Long periods of parental separation from the serving parent due to deployment & exercising



Analysis suggests that the more schools a child attends the greater the negative impact is on his / her attainment.

A child's response to this cycle will differ according to their stage of development.



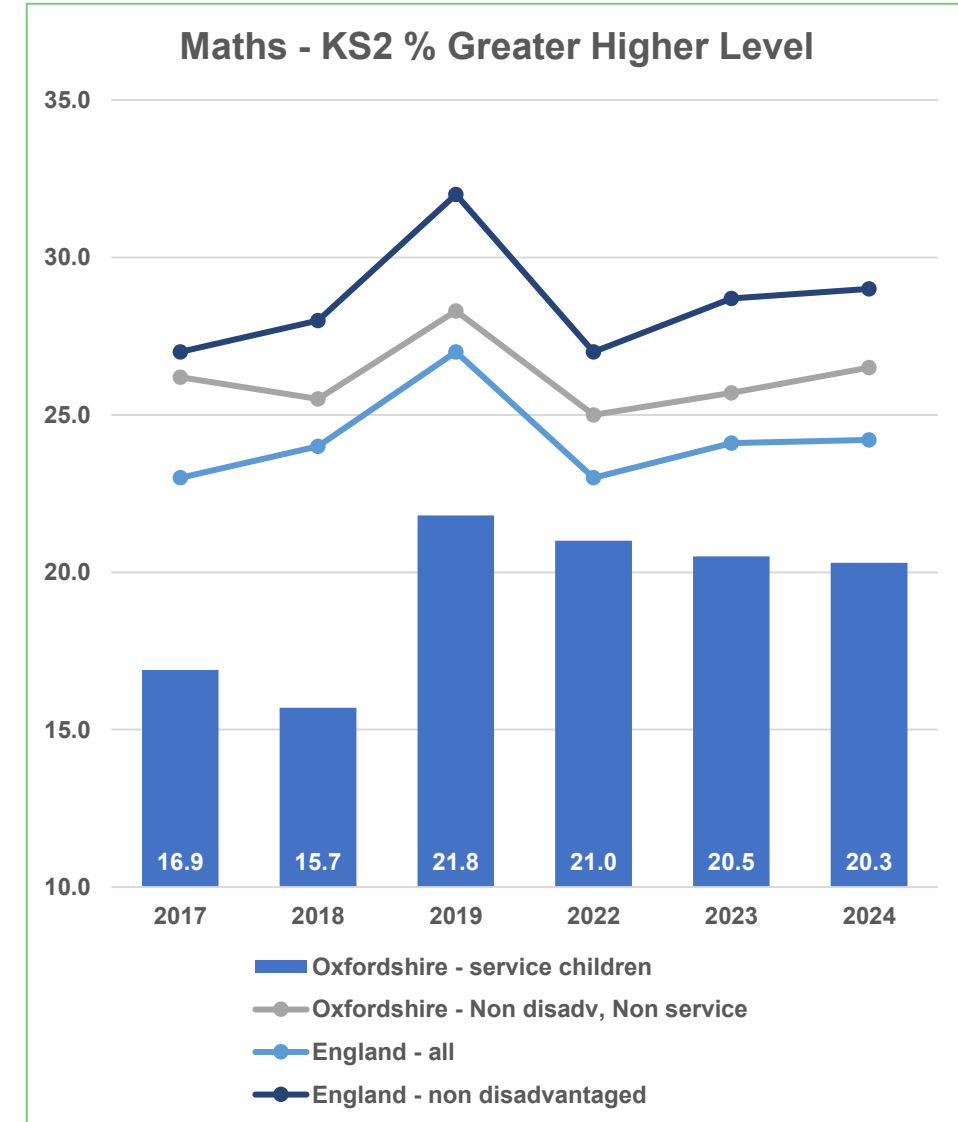
Mobility and deployment may negatively impact Service children through:

- Discontinuity of provision through delays, poor communication and transition arrangements, as well as curriculum changes.
- Emotional wellbeing, disrupted friendships, and increased potential for bullying.
- Increased emotional and behavioural problems.
- A higher incidence of mental health issues in children and their parents.
- Increased incidence of the child as carer.

(McCullouch and Hall, 2016)

Impact on academic outcomes

- National data indicates that on many measures, Service children collectively perform similarly to 'all civilian children'.
- The picture is less clear when performance is compared to that of '*civilian children who are also non-disadvantaged*'. This is a fairer comparison given that very few Service children attract disadvantaged pupil premium (DPP).
- Performance gaps on this comparison can be seen at greater depth (KS1 & 2), grades 7-9 at GCSE, or at % A & A*s at A level. (*An Oxfordshire example in the graph is shown.*)
- Furthermore, Service children are less likely than their non-Service peers to progress to higher education. They are therefore treated as a targeted group by the Office for Students (**Equality of Opportunity Risk Register**)



So, a disadvantaged or a vulnerable group?

Neither! However, many Service children are **potentially** vulnerable at certain times due to their Service lifestyle and this **may** lead to disadvantage. This is why the Covenant and Service Pupil Premium exists.

Schools therefore need to have a **tailored** pastoral offer for Service children (and their parents) and **all staff** need to be aware of the challenges that can come with a Service lifestyle.

It is also important to recognise that Service children are NOT a homogenous group. They are

Distinctive

Diverse

Dynamic

Furthermore, those with traditional vulnerabilities, such as having SEND, can really struggle with a Service lifestyle given its unpredictability and changes.



Some of the things Service children say

All of these are direct quotes to the author.

"I become dad when he is away, I have to leave school and pick my sister up and I am always worried I will be late!"

"Luckily... my dad was not injured while he was away, but it was traumatising. The fear of it is absolutely traumatising."

"Because we were moving about, I missed a lot of maths lessons. And maths is not my strong point. Because of that domino effect of it."

"Your parent's gone for months... sometimes you don't even get to say goodbye, and there's your dad gone for six-odd months in an unknown country."

"You've got so much on your plate... I think there's a sense of, because you're young, they think you do just get home and doss off. But it's different for a service child."

"I remember doing year six twice. Because I did it at one school and then I went to another one and [they] were like, nah, you've joined us at a weird time, so you've got to do year six again. So, I think that affects your education because you're like, I've done all these subjects, I'm not interested, I don't want to be here."

"My mum and dad are military and sometimes both go away, and I have to live with other people who have completely different rules"

How successful schools respond

- Pastoral support takes the needs of Service children into account.
- Service children have opportunities to meet other Service children and reflect on their experiences.
- Targeted support is offered during deployment or separation and before or after a house move.
- Identification and support for young carers in Armed Forces families is embedded in policy.
- Understanding of the Armed Forces and of concepts such as deployment is embedded in the curriculum.

Source: Thriving Lives Toolkit Principle 2: Wellbeing is Supported (SCiP Alliance)



Governor questions to consider



Are your school-to-school transition policies and procedures robust? ***Where is your evidence?*** (e.g. Do you undertake entry and exit surveys with families?)

Do you provide evidence-based, bespoke pastoral support for your Service children and their parents? Is it evaluated? ***Where is your evidence?***

Do school leaders evaluate the school's Service children provision? ***The SCiP Alliance's Thriving Lives Toolkit is highly recommended for doing this and accessing professional development.***



The 7 principles of effective support

Principle		Vision
1	Our approach is clear	Leaders' understanding and approach ensure resources and policies improve Armed Forces children's outcomes.
2	Wellbeing is supported	Tailored pastoral provision supports Armed Forces children's mental health and wellbeing.
3	Achievement is maximised	Teaching, assessment and support ensure the continuity of Armed Forces children's learning and progression.
4	Transition is effective	Systems and support ensure seamless transitions for Armed Forces children arriving at and leaving school.
5	Children are heard	Armed Forces children's diverse voices are heard and inform the support they receive.
6	Parents are engaged	Strong home-school partnerships help Armed Forces families feel valued as part of the school community.
7	Staff are well-informed	Supportive training and networks ensure all staff understand and support each Armed Forces child.

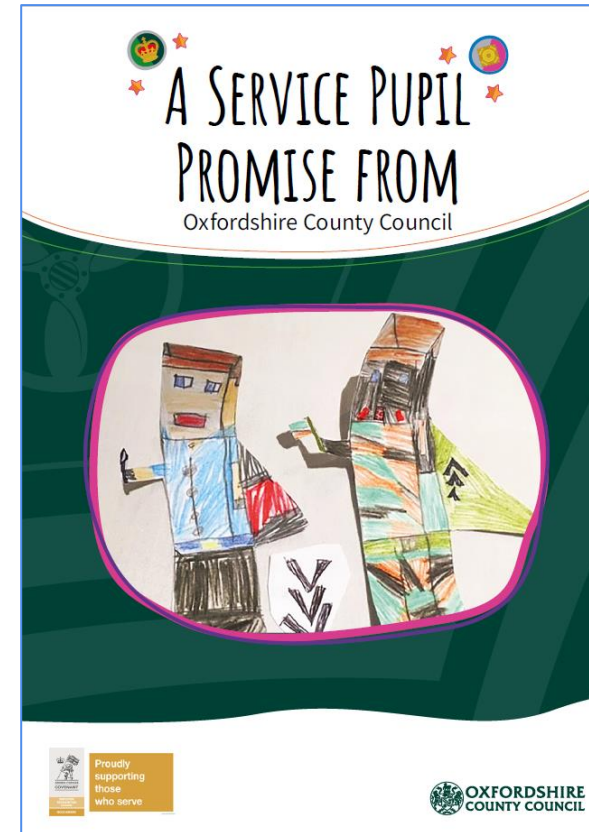
Further support from Oxfordshire County Council

Information and guidance for schools with Service pupils [Service children | Oxfordshire Schools](#)

Service Pupils Promise from Oxfordshire County Council [Service pupils promise 2020.pdf](#)

Toolkit for the support of Service Children (updated July 2025) [Supporting Children from Armed Forces Families](#)

OCC's Service pupil premium (SPP): DfE information for schools [Service Pupil Premium for School Leaders.pdf](#)



Summary

Approximately 20% of Royal Air Force personnel are based in Oxfordshire. Our schools collectively educate between 2500 and 3000 school-aged children and young people from a military background (Service children) each year.



Treating Service children and their families with respect and fairness in the provision of goods and services is enshrined in law through the Armed Forces Covenant. Governing bodies must pay **due regard** to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when carrying out the provision of education.



A core function of governance is overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure the money is well spent. This covers Service Pupil Premium spending.



Additional support

Service Children In State Schools (SCISS)

<https://www.sciss.org.uk/>

Service Children's Progression (SCiP) Alliance

<https://www.scipalliance.org/>

Service Pupils in schools: Non-statutory guidance
(first published 1 April 2025) [Service Pupils in](#)

[Schools: Non-statutory guidance - GOV.UK](#)

Supporting Service children Guidance for
governing boards in schools and trusts

<https://www.nga.org.uk/knowledge-centre/supporting-service-children/>



With thanks to Cambrai Primary school, North Yorkshire