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Mr S Douglas  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Douglas

**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 pupils, during my visit on 11 October 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 children 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 your staff, governors, service children and families and with a representative of the Royal Air Force College at Cranwell. In addition, documentation and analyses provided by the school were scrutinised.

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

## Key features

- The school serves the military establishment at Cranwell, the village of Cranwell and the surrounding district. Currently, 65% of pupils are from service families; mostly from the Royal Air Force. The proportion of service families' children has been as high as 90% in the past. Pupils from service families are relatively advantaged; most of their parents are educated to degree level and beyond. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities at the school is lower than the national average. Of these, fewer than half are from service backgrounds.
- The proportion of service and ex-service families within the community is growing. In recent years, more service families have purchased houses within the school's community. The number of service pupils joining and leaving the school during the year (mobility) is high. It is currently lower than it has been in the past, at between 20–30%, but in some year groups, such as last year's Year 6 cohort, it was as high as 50%. The school also provides temporary education for children of service families attending short courses at Cranwell, typically for six months or so. Some of these families are foreign nationals representing the Air Forces of different nations and their children speak English as an additional language.
- The school is high achieving. By the end of Year 6, standards are usually well above the national average. Pupils from all groups do well, including those from service backgrounds. On the whole, service pupils attain higher standards in the core subjects of English and mathematics than non-service pupils at the end of each key stage. Service pupils are more likely than non-service pupils to be identified as gifted and/or talented and less likely to require intervention to support them or be identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school is also very effective in overcoming the educational and emotional disadvantages caused by frequent moves, isolation and the stresses of active service.
- Emotional support is tackled sensitively and provided only as needed. It was clear from talking to service parents that they do not wish their children to stand out as different in any way, as this is opposite to the normality they seek. Serving officers are referred to as 'Mr' or 'Mrs' to emphasise their parental status. The school works with service welfare agencies such as the Soldiers, Seamen, and Airmen Family Association (SSAFA) and the RAF Families Federation on a similar 'as needed' basis. The school's curriculum includes teaching the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme, some units of which are of particular relevance to service children, such as those on 'new beginnings'.
- Service parents are very happy with the school and its provision. They said providing stability for their children, to counter the inevitable disruptions of service life, was very important to them. The choice of school was crucial because it must provide normality and continuity for the children and the family. A growing number of service families choose to settle within the

school's catchment area, even though this may mean the airman or soldier has to commute long distances to work when deployed from the base.

- With few exceptions, service pupils did not like frequent changes of school. For them, the friendships they forged at school were very important. Losing friends caused them distress. The school's pastoral systems and the partnership developed with parents to respond to the pupils' emotional needs are of a high quality.
- The school is well placed to support service families. Senior staff have a very good understanding of the pressures of service life. Several staff have a service background. Staff are often long-serving and have built up excellent relationships with service families and the base. Over time, very effective networks of contacts and relationships have developed. The school uses this extensive range of contacts to provide support when needed, some outside of the local authority, such as when requiring support for transient service pupils with English as an additional language.
- The school organises several events that particularly impact on service families, such as 'grandparents' day', which brings together extended families from far and wide, and an 'Experiences' day, in which Armed Forces personnel are involved, including service mothers and fathers, who demonstrate their skills and work with groups of pupils.
- Transition arrangements for service pupils are managed very well. Records received vary greatly in quality. Some records received, for example, failed to identify pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Records from service schools abroad are more consistently useful. Children's Education and Advisory Service (CEAS) provides a 'moving Schools Pack' as part of their mitigating mobility initiative. A full assessment of each pupil is carried out after two months. The school is careful not to interpret gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding as them having special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, it has thorough arrangements for monitoring pupils' progress, determining those who may be making less progress than expected, and providing a scale of interventions to boost progress. A very comprehensive record is sent through to other primary and secondary schools at the point of transfer out of the school. These include records that provide evidence from all of the years the pupil has been with the school. The school has good links with the childcare provider within the base and well-established links with the secondary, selective grammar schools, community colleges and boarding independent schools that service pupils move on to.
- Support for the induction of service pupils new to the school is also handled very well. Newcomers particularly appreciated the school's 'buddy' arrangements to help them settle in. They were impressed and felt welcomed by the bright displays of pupils' work all around the school.
- Currently, approximately 40% of the school's register of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities comprises pupils from service backgrounds. They represent, over time, the full spectrum of special

needs, including autism, speech and language difficulties, dyslexia, behavioural difficulties, cerebral palsy and Downs Syndrome. Service pupils are represented at School Action, School Action Plus and Statement of Special Educational Needs levels. Pupils achieve well, making two full levels of progress across Key Stage 2 and generally reaching high Level 3s and Level 4s at Year 6.

- Arrangements for safeguarding children are very comprehensive. The school is alert to the possibility of mental stress in service pupils and their families and has good communications with the school nursing, educational psychologists and the voluntary sector to provide support and intervention where needed. All staff, volunteers and governors have the necessary up-to-date clearances. This despite the turnover of volunteers from service backgrounds being very high, to the extent that the budget for clearances is heavily overspent this year.
- Apart from admissions, where its flexibility has been reduced in recent years, the school also feels that the gradual loss of funding to cover the costs of coping with transience is potentially detrimental to the service it provides. Administration costs are significantly higher for service pupils and families and staffing has to be flexible enough to cope with mid-term admissions. To provide fully for service families, the school believes it needs to facilitate a whole package of support for education, childcare and extended services for service families who work long hours well beyond the school day and who may have transport issues for much of the week.
- The school has strong governance, with good representation from those with a service background. As a school with Foundation status, governors are keen to promote the school's independence. Over time, governors have sought to develop staff and promote roles and responsibilities internally, partly to ensure that the expertise and contacts staff have developed with the service community are retained. At the same time, they are keen that the school acts as a uniting force linking service and civilian communities and promoting harmony.

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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Brian Padgett**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**