Matt Blyton, Oxfordshire County Council (School Improvement) &
Independent Education Adviser

Patrick Alexander, Professor of Education (Oxford Brookes University)

Service Children Transition Project
2024/25

Overview

AIMS

- Capture a snapshot of Armed Forces families' school-to-school transition experiences

- Create a conceptual model for a family-led digital portfolio to support transition.

METHODOLOGY – insights rather than generalisable results!

- 6 schools recruited – high SC numbers & with recognised good practice

- 3 primary, 3 secondary – Catterick (N Yorks), Portsmouth, Carterton (Oxon)

- School leader interviews (6)

- Parental interviews (9)

- Review of records transfer documentation

- Literature review

THE ARMED FORCES
COVENANT FUND TRUST

Summary of Findings – what do you anticipate?

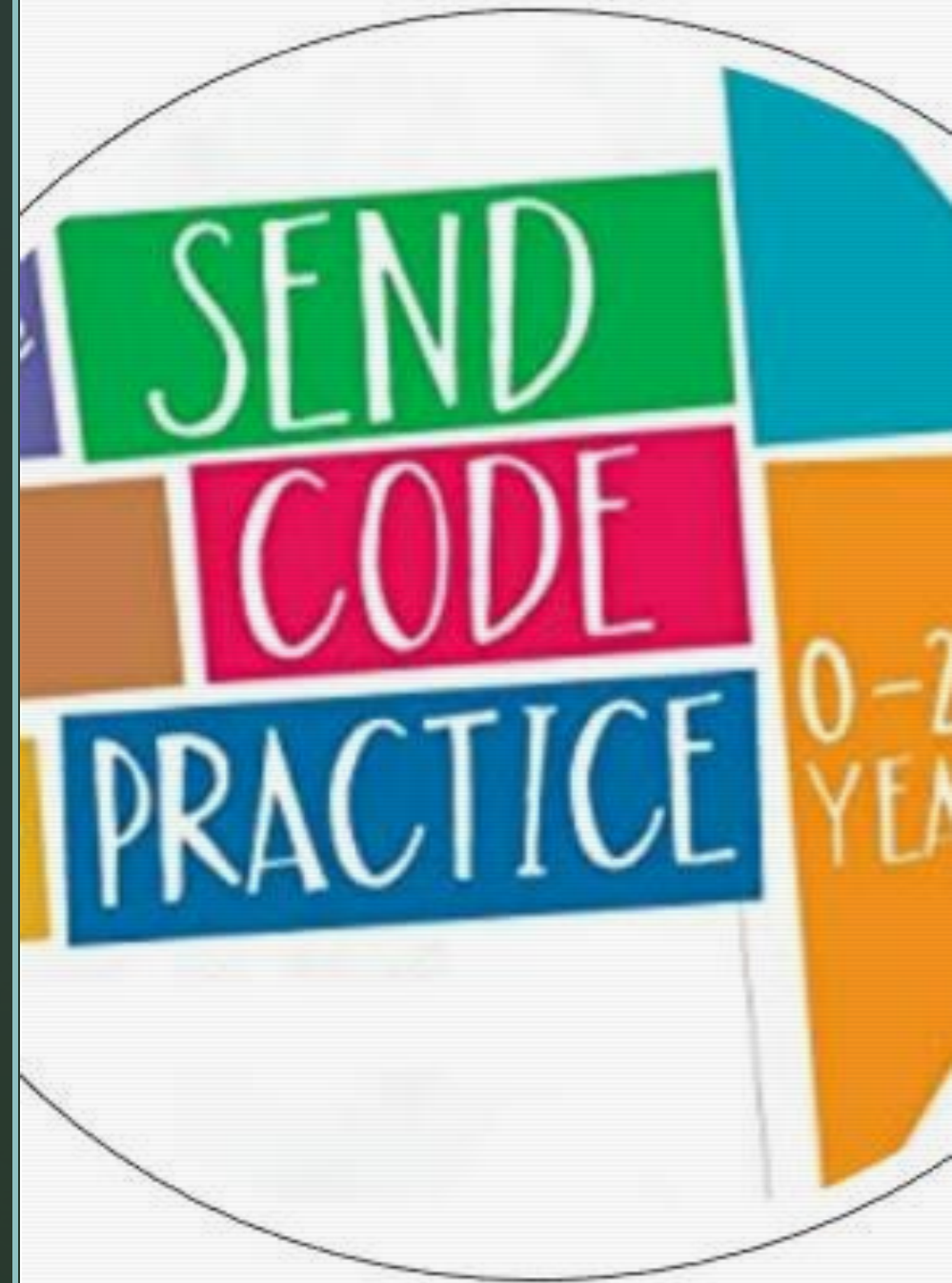- Why the relay baton?

1. Holistic, Personalized Understanding of the Child

Whole Person, Whole Journey

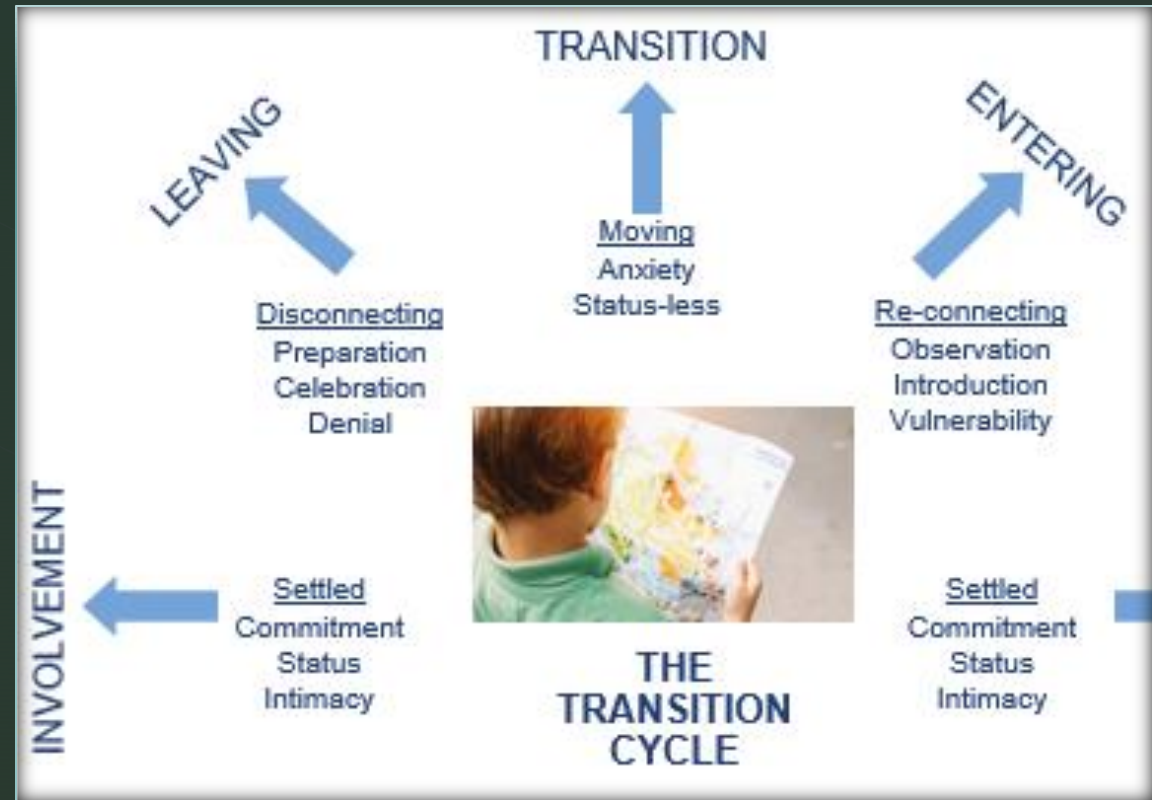2. Continuity of Curriculum and Additional Needs Provision

3. Empowering Student Voice and Agency

4. Formalizing and Systemizing Transition Processes

THE TRANSITION CYCLE

TRANSITION

LEAVING

ENTERING

INVOLVEMENT

Moving
Anxiety
Status-less

Disconnecting
Preparation
Celebration
Denial

Re-connecting
Observation
Introduction
Vulnerability

Settled
Commitment
Status
Intimacy

Settled
Commitment
Status
Intimacy

Whole Person, Whole Journey

5. Collaborative, Relationship-Focused Approach

6. The Parent Perspective

Recommendations

Drawing on the insights from both school leaders and parents, our key recommendations for supporting Service children better during transitions include:

1. Share a **holistic, personalised understanding of each Service child**, capturing their strengths, needs, interests, social-emotional wellbeing, and family/background context.

2. **Minimise curriculum discontinuity**, gaps and repetition through passing on better records of what a child has already covered, including teacher, parent/guardian, and student perceptions of this learning, and tailoring the curriculum more accordingly.

3. **Empower Service children** to actively share their own perspectives, needs and experiences through the transition process.

4. Formalise and systemise transition processes to ensure equitable, sustainable, and effective support, ideally with **more comprehensive statutory guidance**.

5. Foster a collaborative, relationship-focused approach that builds **strong connections with families and between schools**.

6. Implement a comprehensive **digital transition portfolio** that travels with the child to provide a nuanced, holistic picture for new schools, involving parents and children.

Design Principles for a Digital Transition Portfolio

What would you like to see?

- **Discussion** (5-10 minutes): Which design principles do you think would help to create an effective digital transition portfolio for Service Children
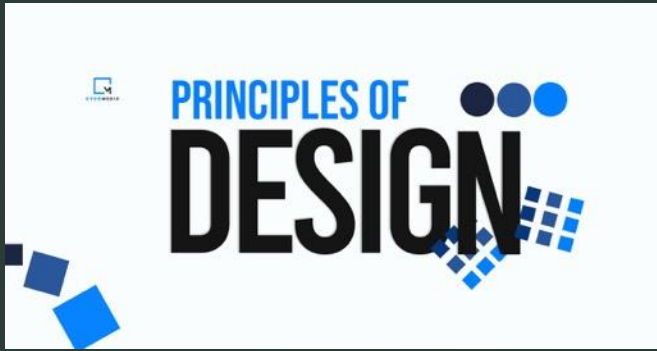
Some Suggested Design Principles

1. Accessibility & Security

- Secure cloud-based platform

- Multi-device compatibility

- Role-based access controls (parents, teachers, students)

- GDPR compliant information sharing

- Easy transfer between schools

2. Academic Records:

- Curriculum coverage tracking ("tick box" system)

- Assessment data for all subjects

- Examples of best work

- Learning approaches that work well

- Gaps or areas needing support

3. SEND Information:

- "Traffic light system" for SEND diagnosis pathway progress

- Current support strategies and interventions

- Triggers and regulation strategies

- Professional reports and assessments

- Reasonable adjustments in place

4. Social-Emotional Elements:

- Student's own summary of themselves

- Friendship-making skills and preferences

- Emotional wellbeing indicators

- Coping strategies

- Key relationships and support networks

5. Context:

- Some limited Service background information

- Previous school moves timeline

- Relevant family circumstances

- Support networks

Modality: Multi-Modal Content Types

Text-Based

Audio-Visual

Interactive Elements

"User Experience" Features Considerations
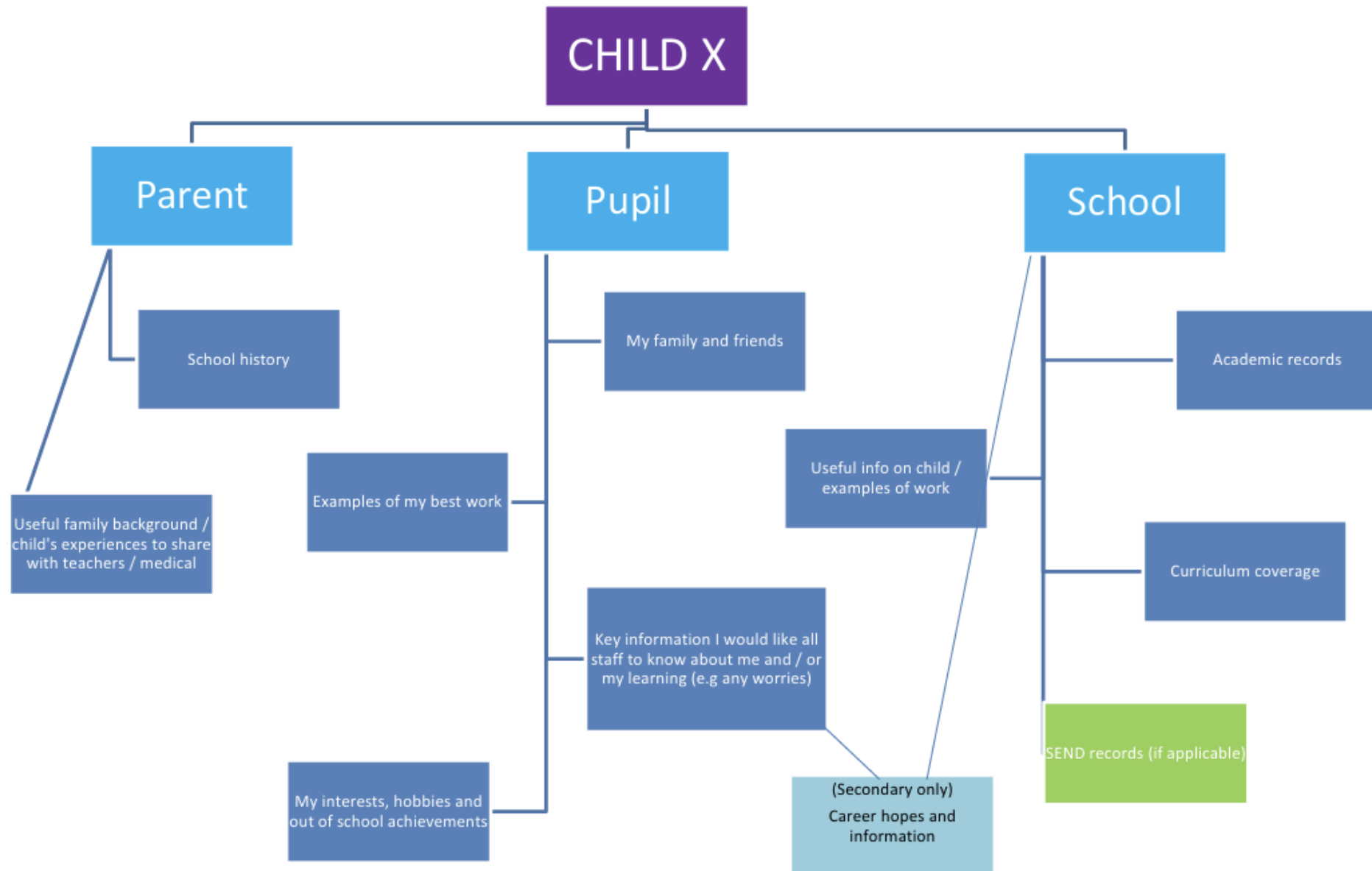
For students

For parents

For school staff

What would make this work consistently and at scale?

- Required minimum content

- Regular update prompts

- Information verification

- Feedback mechanisms

- Impact monitoring (communication and social contract between schools, teachers, family, and students)

Possible Service child cloud-based transition file structure

Suggested Design Principles for a Digital Transition Portfolio: RELAYS

- Relational

- Empowering

- Longitudinal

- Actionable

- Youth-led

- Scalable

The RELAYS framework emphasises: Relational design; Family empowerment; Continuous "narrative" documentation; Practical utility; Student agency; low-tech and scalable solution

Examples from Practice – final reflection

- What does this look like in practice? A basic Gdrive design?

- What have you seen/done in your own setting that works?

- What from your discussion might we take forward?

NEXT STEPS

- Piloting the RELAYS approach with local schools

- Reflecting on process, successes and challenges

- Exploring routes to funding and development for scalable practice

An opportunity for some further research?

(Might require some further funding.)

Bonus slides – the thinking behind 'RELAYS'

RELATIONAL

- Adopt a relational approach from the outset, recognising transition as an ongoing process that takes place between students, families, teachers and schools
- Emphasise the ongoing relationships and social contract between schools and families to champion the best interests of children in transition
- Recognise that meaningful relationships in school, and in school transition, are foundational for enduring experiences of belonging and safety
- The practical process of supporting transition should include opportunities and activities that build lasting relationships, and in turn support the wellbeing of individual students and school communities

EMPOWERING

- Enables parents to be proactive partners in transitions

- Provides agency in how information is shared and presented

- Allows schools to quickly understand and respond to needs

- Gives voice to student strengths and interests

- Supports SEND advocacy across different authorities

- Helps families maintain continuity of support, and to feel visible and heard in the process

LONGITUDINAL

- Tracks curriculum coverage across multiple moves

- Documents SEND assessment and support journey

- Records social-emotional development over time

- Captures transition history and impact

- Maintains history of strategies that work

- Chronicles academic progress across settings

ACTIONABLE

- Presents clear, consistent system for tracking SEND support needs assessment/support provision

- Provides specific information about learning approaches

- Identifies triggers and effective regulation strategies

- Details curriculum gaps requiring attention

- Specifies successful pastoral support strategies

- Outlines practical transition support requirements

YOUTH-LED

- Incorporates "child's own summary of themselves"

- Enables students to express concerns and hopes

- Allows choice in how to present their story

- Provides space for personal goals and aspirations

- Facilitates student voice in transition planning

- Empowers sharing of lived experiences

SCALABLE

- Built on standardized but flexible templates

- Designed for easy adoption across settings

- Supports different armed forces contexts

- Enables consistent information sharing

- Facilitates system-wide implementation

- Allows for ongoing development