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Case Study: Thriving Lives Toolkit Emerging Practice

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Hermitage Academy, Helensburgh, Argyll & Bute.

A secondary school in Scotland, situated on the west coast in Argyll & Bute. Argyll & Bute is home to her Majesty's Naval Base (HMNB) Clyde located in Faslane. It is a major local employer for Service personnel and consequently, of the approximate 1260 students on roll, a significant number are Service children. This school identified a need to have a more formal, personalised approach to supporting Service children aligned with the Scottish approach of Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC).

THE NEED

Students who have parents serving in the Armed Forces can experience transition into and out of Scotland which has a different curriculum and where students begin secondary school at a later age than in other UK nations. They may also face prolonged and repeated periods of separation. The Education Service of the Local Authority (Argyll & Bute Council) provides information and advice for Armed Forces families moving in to the area (https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/sites/default/files/welcome_pack_jan_2018.pdf) which helps families understand the education context into which they are moving. The Council also accesses the MOD Education Support Fund, to provide extra support and resources for students from Armed Forces families in schools. Argyll & Bute Council have a number of other offers to support Armed Forces families including an online Armed Forces Children and Young People newsletter, The Community Covenant Partnership and the Covenant Grant Fund which offers grants of up to £20,000 for local projects that support community integration or local delivery of services. However, the school did not have a named point of contact, staff lacked awareness of who the Service children were in their classes and as one teacher put it "not sure what I would do with that information either". This meant a need for the school to put into place some more formal approaches to tailored provision for Armed Forces children.

SOLUTION TAKEN.

Two members of staff were appointed as leads for Armed Forces children with shared responsibility. These members of staff linked into the Royal Caledonian Education Trust (RCET) and the SCiP Alliance, attending the Scottish Hub's webinar event on the Thriving Lives Toolkit.

These staff attended the Scottish SCiP Hub launch of the Thriving Lives Toolkit and were able to be linked in with other schools and support organisations, learn about the issues Armed Forces children may experience and learn about potential interventions. The school has also made Principle 7 of the Toolkit, 'Parents are engaged and staff are well informed' one of their key focusses. The staff also took part in focus groups with The International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS) with a group of Armed Forces children talking with the researchers about their experiences of transition and deployment, and the support they encountered and needed. Teachers' presence here enabled them to hear the student voice. This included a feeling amongst some older students that they did not want to be singled out for special attention because they wanted to be treated 'normally'. This highlighted the complexity of providing support for Armed Forces children who may at times need staff to be aware of their situation but to be treated equitably.

Hermitage Academy engaged with the RCET developed programme Forces and Me, a community for young people aged 11 and up. It is primarily, but not exclusively, aimed at young people who have moved into the Helensburgh area and offers them the opportunity to connect with other young people who are in a similar situation. The group engage with activities such as games, chats and some small projects.

For parents there is a web page on the Hermitage Academy website which highlights and links to useful resources: <http://www.hermitageacademy.argyll-bute.sch.uk/forces-families>

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

The leads for Armed Forces children have engaged with the wider community and significantly increased their understanding of the possible needs of this group of children and their parents. Engaging with the SCiP Alliance and iCeGS in the research raised awareness across the school as a whole and the school in planning to present assemblies and staff meetings informing staff and students of what it is like to be an Armed Forces pupil and how they can be supported. Linking in to regional and national organisations such as RCET provided motivation to drive forward provision and offered networks and resources which could support them. The school now has a dedicated team of Armed Forces ambassadors within the school, have an Armed Forces Families notice board and are working to develop welcome packs for Armed Forces families new to the school and the local community. The Thriving Lives Toolkit provided a useful framework for identifying existing knowledge and practice but more importantly for devising an action plan for moving forward to realise longer term outcomes such as increased family engagement and improved student wellbeing, engagement and attainment.

PRACTITIONER ADVICE

- Engaging with the local Council to identify what they do to support Armed Forces families is important. They might be able to provide funding for additional staff resource.
- Appoint a named contact. This not only facilitates communication from the school to families and other organisations but fosters responsibility and can galvanise action.
- Working in partnership with support organisations like RCET and SCiP places you into a supportive network of likeminded, passionate individuals and opens up repositories of resources.