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Case Study: Thriving Lives Toolkit

Embedded Practice

January 2022



Raigmore Primary School, Inverness.

Raigmore is a primary school in Scotland, situated in the capital of Scotland's Highlands. Inverness has an Army Barracks and Married Quarters close to the school and so the school typically has many Armed Forces families on roll. Approximately 50% of the 200 students in Raigmore Primary are Armed Forces children. This primary school identified a need to better support their Armed Forces Children with the transitions they may experience throughout their lives. These transitions may include separation, deployment cycles as well as change and loss. They have recognised that the health and wellbeing of the children and families can have a huge impact on how they engage with their individual learning experiences. On this basis, additional support has been put in place for the children and their families. This offers invaluable support throughout these transitions and helps them to understand, express and manage their emotions in a safe and secure environment. This helps them to develop a sense of belonging and to feel valued and included in their learning.

THE NEED

Raigmore's Armed Forces children have parents serving in the British Army and they can experience multiple transitions (in and out of Scotland, England and around the world) as well as repeated periods of separation. Whilst all staff at the school are trained on how to support Armed Forces children and their families, the school did not have a dedicated staff member to deliver tailored provision. This limited the opportunities to offer additional support during these transitions and to understand, express and manage their emotions in a safe environment. The location of the school (in Scotland) meant that pupil premium funding was not available.

SOLUTION TAKEN

The school successfully applied for funding which secured the employment of a member of staff dedicated to Armed Forces children and their families. This allowed the school to ensure that their specific needs became a key priority. The actions taken so far include:

- A dedicated member of staff is responsible for all Armed Forces children and they are also supported by the School Management Team.
- Families are warmly welcomed into the school and are given opportunities to visit their new school and ask any questions prior to starting. When children leave Raigmore they are provided with a 'Leaver's Report' which focusses specifically on Forces children, their journey and what it means to them.
- All staff are trained to raise awareness of Armed Forces children and how to respond to the transitions they may experience. Training is re-visited regularly and staff work together to share good practise to meet the needs of all children.

- The school communicates openly with service families to support them through transitions and deployment. Support is flexible and it is tailored to the individual needs of the family.
- A dedicated Google Classroom called “Raigy Forces” has been set up. This has created an online community where learning, experiences and useful resources can be shared. The classroom can be accessed at any time and is a useful way of sharing updates with parents during periods of separation.
- “Raigy Forces” is a group dedicated to supporting the schools Armed Forces children and their families. It is a safe space for all children, whether that is in a small group or 1:1 situation. It helps to foster their sense of belonging, it gives them a voice, it allows them to have ownership of their experiences and pride in being part of an Armed Forces family and the community in which they live.
- The school develops resources and works alongside external partners to enhance their own provision and to share best practice.
- Armed forces children are recognised and celebrated across the school and their local community. This has included celebrating Armed Forces Day and displaying their experiences and individual creativity through displays and presentations.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

The dedicated staff member responsible for Armed Forces children draws on internal and external resources to continually develop their practice. All staff know who the Armed Forces children are in their class and know when parent(s) are on deployment. Staff are more confident in working with Armed Forces children and have a variety of resources available to support them. Armed Forces children know that they are an important part of the school; they feel valued, important and that their voices are heard. They have a SAFE SPACE to share their thoughts and feelings and are more confident in using a variety of tools to help them manage the emotions involved in transitioning and those experienced throughout the cycle of deployment. Armed Forces children know who they can talk to at school when they need help or support. An open door policy extends to the parents who are encouraged to make contact with the school to let staff know about deployment or any other issues.

- The Armed Forces children are happy and have noticeable improvements in their well-being. They have adopted a more positive growth mind-set and as a result are keen to try new things and do their best in their learning.
- They have increased resilience and confidence.
- They recognise and celebrate diversity and take pride in being part of the Armed Forces Community.

“They feel included, they feel happy, they feel they can talk to us, strategies to control and manage their emotions are used in class all the time. Children show us that the things we have shown them work. The parents see that this is benefitting their children. We are offering this help at home as well and the parents are telling us that they see it helping at home. It provides consistency. The class teachers notice these things are working. We are seeing this in all the right places.” (Teacher).

PRACTITIONER ADVICE

- Securing funding to create dedicated time for a member of staff allowed the school to embed policy and practice for supporting Armed Forces children and their families into daily school life.
- This member of staff was able to work with the senior leaders to develop awareness, develop resources and embed a programme of activities and events, which is sustainable going forward. The combination of group and one-to-one activities ensured each Armed Forces child received the most appropriate type of support based on their individual needs.
- Engaging families from the very beginning when the child starts school is just as important as maintaining good communication with them.