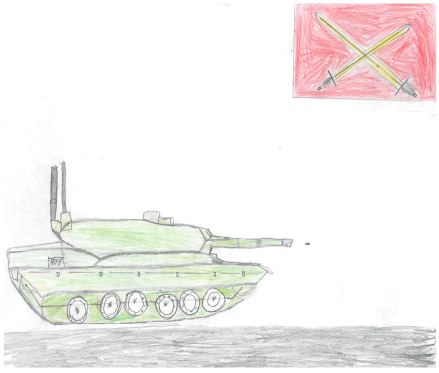
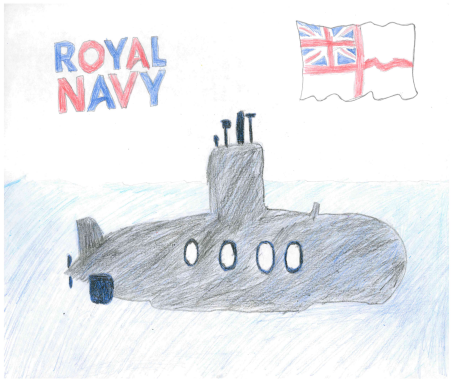
Service Children In State Schools National Executive Advisory Committee

Service Children In State Schools





The Voice of Schools
Supporting Service Children in England

Voice of Schools Survey Report 2020 - 2021

Supporting Service Children: The Voice of Schools

Consultation Findings

A report by Tiller Research Ltd on behalf of the National Executive Advisory Committee (NEAC) of Service Children In State Schools (SCISS)

Authors: Catharine Rose and Peter Rose

Tiller research

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Executive Summary

Background

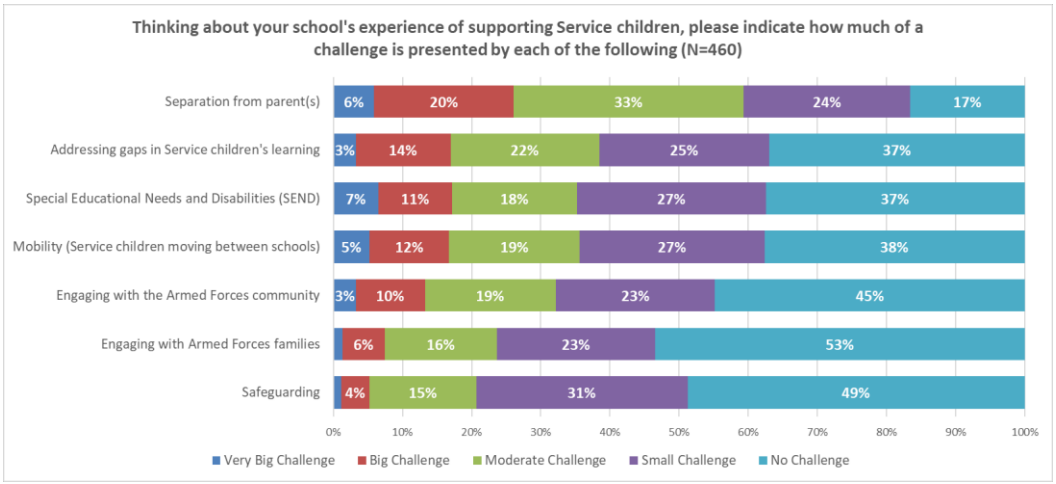
- Service Children in State Schools (SCISS) is a voluntary affiliated network of state-maintained schools in England that have any number of Service children on roll. A Service child is a person whose parent, or carer, serves in the regular Armed Forces or as a reservist, or has done at any point during the first 25 years of that person's life.
- SCISS aims to enhance the education and welfare of Service children, working with key partners and affiliated schools to achieve the best possible outcomes for this group of children and young people.
- SCISS is led by a National Executive Advisory Committee (NEAC). The core purpose of the SCISS NEAC is to be the '*Voice of Schools*' supporting Service children. This involves engaging with policy makers, and identifying effective practice to share with the SCISS network of schools.
- The SCISS NEAC commissioned Tiller Research Ltd to undertake a consultation with schools who have Service children on roll. The purpose of the consultation was to ensure that the group's forthcoming action plan truly reflects the areas of most importance for schools.

The Consultation

- The consultation contained three elements:
    - A core online questionnaire of Likert-type rating scales and free text responses. This was completed by 461 respondents, many from schools that had no previous involvement with the SCISS network;
    - An extended online questionnaire exploring a wider range of topics relating to a school's work with Service children. All respondents to the core questionnaire were offered the opportunity to complete; 234 responses were received;
    - A total of 17 semi-structured telephone interviews, undertaken with a representative sample of questionnaire respondents, exploring their responses in more depth.
- Data was analysed both as a complete set, and by looking at differences between key subgroups: school type; main Service of a school's Service child cohort; number of Service children on roll; percentage of those on roll who are Service children; local authority quintile of Service Pupil Premium recipients; role of respondent.
- The proportion of responses received from schools in each subgroup were broadly in line with those in the overall population of Service children in England, both for the core and extended questionnaires. Over three-quarters of responses were from a headteacher (55%) or other senior leader (22%). A further 13% of respondents were a Welfare or Support professional.

Understanding the Challenges

- The questionnaire listed seven previously documented challenges experienced by some Service children, their families, and/or the schools they attend. Respondents were asked to indicate how much of a challenge these areas presented to their school, with five response options ranging from 'Very Big challenge' to 'No challenge'. The overall responses were:



- Respondents were asked to say more about the most significant challenges they experienced in relation to their work with Service children:

Separation from parent(s)
Emotional and behavioural changes observed in Service children when separated from and/or reunited with a serving parent were identified as presenting the single biggest challenge for one in five respondents (19%). These most commonly coincided with a parent starting a deployment, though the disruption and change of a parent returning after a significant absence was often noted as presenting a more complex challenge. Several headteachers told us they faced frequent term-time holiday requests and/or unauthorised absences when parents returned from a deployment. These were viewed favourably due to the benefits of the family having time together, despite the impact on the school's attendance figures.

Addressing gaps in Service children's learning
Gaps in core learning as a result of Service children moving between schools was the most frequent challenge identified in this theme. This was an even greater challenge where Service children have moved between the different UK educational systems, or overseas. Lack of post-16 funding for Service children was noted as a particular issue, increasing the challenge for schools supporting Service children progressing to higher qualifications.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
Significant issues were identified in relation to the lengthy processes for assessing SEND needs. This was particularly problematic for Service children when combined with mobility, as relocation typically means that assessment processes have to be restarted. This can leave some Service children without the support that other children with similar needs receive for many years.

Mobility (Service children moving between schools)
Short notice warning of relocation, both arriving and departing, caused significant challenges. Schools reported that it was common for Service children to arrive with no educational records, or other relevant information such as SEND needs. Inconsistent and/or incomplete information meant schools faced significant challenges and delays in providing appropriate educational and pastoral support.

Engaging with the Armed Forces Community
Levels of engagement with local Armed Forces communities varied considerably. There were many examples of excellent local practice, but this appeared to mostly depend on the work of specific individuals. Schools with members of staff with a background in the Armed Forces often reported better engagement, able as they were to draw on their knowledge and/or contacts, though this was neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for effective engagement.

Engaging with Armed Forces families
Engagement with families was not generally regarded as a more significant challenge for Armed Forces families than with other families, although the nature of the challenge was at times distinctive. Several schools noted challenges related to the transitory nature of many Service families. Lack of contact with deployed parents was regarded as inevitable. Issues such as a lack of transport sometimes exacerbated challenges related to engagement between the home parent and the school.

It was also noted that some parents were reluctant to engage with schools on issues related to their status as an Armed Forces family. Some families chose not to identify themselves as a Service family at all. This was often, though not exclusively, a greater challenge in schools with small numbers of Service children, and with Service leavers transitioning to civilian life.

Safeguarding
Challenges related to safeguarding were often identified as a consequence of other challenges, especially in relation to mobility and lack of parental engagement. Some respondents felt that they did not receive information they needed from the Armed Forces community, including from welfare teams.

Additional Challenges

Respondents were asked if they experienced any significant challenges in relation to supporting Service children that were in addition to the presented themes:

Support for Parents

One in ten respondents (11%) highlighted challenges related to the needs of parents that impact on Service children. Examples included: mental health needs; impact of injuries; and practical challenges faced by lone parents (whether through permanent separation or deployment). Some respondents felt that parents may be reluctant to access Armed Forces welfare support, fearing that this would have a detrimental impact on the career of the serving parent(s).

Emotional Impact

Mobility and separation are the features of life as a Service child viewed as the most common sources of emotional challenges. However, the emotional impact of being a Service child is not always problematic.

Service children are often viewed as being emotionally resilient. Effective emotional support can enable a resilient person to thrive in the face of challenges. Therefore, providing support for the emotional impact of being a Service child might be usefully viewed as a core support requirement, rather than just a need for those experiencing difficulties.

Social Impact

Some schools felt that mobility and/or separation from parent(s) had a significant social impact. Service children sometimes experienced difficulties, or avoided, making friends. They were often less likely to engage with extra-curricular activities, and so missed out on other opportunities to socialise. Others felt that Service children had excellent social skills, but as they grew older experienced difficulties integrating fully into longstanding friendship groups.

Many respondents felt that Service children benefited from connecting with other Service children. This was a particular challenge for schools with few Service children.

Low Numbers of Service Children

Several schools with low numbers of Service children identified qualitatively different challenges and opportunities to those with larger Service child cohorts. These schools were less likely to feel that they had the necessary experience or resource to meet the needs of the cohort, especially those with a greater level of need. Quality sources of support (e.g. through networking with schools with larger Service child cohorts) were typically viewed as being important. Access to this type of support varied considerably.

Despite these challenges, some schools with small Service child cohorts highlighted advantages of their position. Schools with very small numbers of Service children typically felt more able to provide effective bespoke support than schools with larger cohorts.

Identifying Needs

Many schools found that identifying the needs of Service families could be difficult. Sometimes this was because families were reluctant to identify their Service status. This was particularly likely in areas with low numbers of Service children, and when starting a new school following a parent's retirement.

It was also common for families not to think about notifying schools of deployments, and returns from deployment. Several respondents expressed frustration at this, as they felt it missed an opportunity to plan and/or provide appropriate support. Identifying effective ways to build trust and communication with families was seen as desirable, but particularly challenging for those schools with limited numbers and/or experience working with Service children.

English as an Additional Language (EAL)

A small number of respondents identified specific challenges engaging with Service families where parents did not have English as their first language. Although this was not a widespread issue, it is likely to be quite pertinent in schools located near particular regiments.

Differences Between Subgroups

- Overall, the *order* in which the seven themes present a challenge was largely consistent across all subgroups. However, there were a few notable exceptions:
    - Mobility was identified as the biggest challenge for schools with predominantly British Army children, with 35% identifying this as a 'very big' or 'big' challenge. In contrast, mobility was the third ranked challenge for schools with mostly Royal Air Force children, with 26% of these schools identifying this as a 'very big' or 'big' challenge; and the fifth ranked challenge for schools with predominantly Royal Navy and/or Royal Marines children (9%);
    - Mobility was also the biggest challenge for schools with 25% or more Service children. In contrast, mobility was the fifth ranked challenge for schools with less than 5% of Service children on roll. It is likely that the disruption experienced by schools as a result of mobility is related to the number of Service children on roll;
    - Schools with less than 25% Service children identified 'Separation from parent(s)' as their biggest challenge. In contrast, separation was ranked fourth among schools with 25% or more Service children. This difference might be explained by the limited opportunity for natural peer support/ shared experiences in schools with fewer Service children. In addition, schools with larger Service child cohorts typically have staff with greater knowledge and experience of working with Service children, and are often more able to focus pastoral resources on the particular needs of this group;
    - Secondary schools overall identified 'Engaging with Armed Forces families' as a greater challenge than did Primary or Special schools. In contrast, Special schools identified SEND needs as their biggest challenge, with 'Addressing gaps in learning' much less of a challenge than for other schools. These differences are likely to relate to fundamental features of the different types of schools, more than they do to specific issues in relation to Service children.
- There were some differences in the *scale* of challenge experienced by the different subgroups. Even where there were similarities between the relative challenge presented by each theme, these often presented a bigger challenge for some subgroups than for others. The most notable differences were:
    - Primary schools were more likely to identify 'big' or 'very big' challenges than were secondary schools;
    - Schools with a majority British Army cohort were generally more likely to identify 'big' or 'very big' challenges than those with Service children cohorts from other Services. However, in relation to 'Separation from parent(s)', schools with a majority RAF (42%) or Royal Navy/Marines (37%) Service child cohort were more likely to view separation as a 'very big' or 'big' challenge than those with a majority British Army cohort (33%);
    - Across all themes, schools with smaller Service child cohorts were much less likely to identify 'big' or 'very big' challenges than were schools with larger Service child cohorts;
    - Schools in both Local Authority Service Pupil Premium Quintile 5 (those areas with the highest overall numbers of SPP recipients) and Service Pupil Premium Quintile 1 (those areas with the lowest overall numbers of SPP recipients) were more likely to identify themes as 'big' or 'very big' challenges than were those in Quintiles 2-4. Particular challenges identified in the qualitative data for schools in areas with low overall numbers of Service children included a lack of local knowledge or support networks to draw on when needed.

Information and Support

- Respondents were asked to identify information or support that they currently access that they would recommend to other schools as being helpful for work with Service children. Around 40% of respondents answering this question explicitly said that they did not currently access information or support either locally or nationally. Some felt they were able to meet the needs of Service children within their existing resources, though others had been unable to find anything helpful. A few secondary schools commented that the available support was not suitable for their needs, as it was viewed as focussed on primary schools rather than the needs of older pupils.

- The most frequently identified useful support locally/ regionally were local Armed Forces (15.3%), including provision from local military bases and welfare services, and from Local Authorities (14.5%). However, provision varies considerably around the country. Many schools, in particular those located some distance from a local base, felt they lacked the support from the Armed Forces that they thought would be useful to them. Dedicated provision from Local Authorities for Service children and/or their families was highly valued, but is only available in a few areas.
- Armed Forces charities (including specific programmes for Service children) were the most frequently identified useful support from national/ online sources (19%), followed by information from UK government departments (6%). SCISS were mentioned by several respondents, as were the Service Children's Progression Alliance (SCiP). There appeared to be some confusion about the differences between these two organisations. Together they were mentioned as a helpful source of support by just under one in ten respondents (9%).
- Given the emotional demands Service families often face, it is perhaps not surprising that some schools (6%) sought out specific support for mental health. This support was almost always from charities, both local and national, as statutory/NHS sources of mental health support were identified as difficult to access.
- A range of suggestions were made for improving the information and support available to schools in relation to supporting Service children. These included suggestions related to both the content of available support, and the process for accessing this:
    - A directory of support for Service children;
    - Outcomes data for Service children;
    - Improved national co-ordination of support for Service children, such as an umbrella body;
    - Information and support tailored to the range of different circumstances of schools with Service children, including best practice examples from schools with similar characteristics;
    - More consistent connections with local or regional Armed Forces contacts;
    - Improved support preparing Service children for transfers, and the creation of consistent mechanisms to enable a smooth transition to their new school;
    - Timely access to professional support for Service children experiencing emotional difficulties.

Service Pupil Premium

- Almost all schools reported that their Service Pupil Premium was used for specific resources or activities focused on their Service children. Three-quarters of schools (76%) used some of their Service Pupil Premium funding to provide **emotional and/or mentoring support** for Service children.
- Almost half of respondent schools (48%) used the Service Pupil Premium to enable Service children to participate in **enrichment activities**. This included activities to increase 'cultural capital' as well as afterschool clubs and social activities. A similar proportion (47%) used this resource to provide **academic support**. This includes targeted catch-up support for Service children with gaps in learning, and access to additional resources and experiences relevant to the curriculum.
- Just under one quarter of respondent schools (24%) used the Service Pupil Premium to fund or part-fund **staff posts**. Through this action, schools were better able to meet the needs of Service children by having specific individuals with the time to understand and respond to the needs of Service children.
- Just over half of respondents identified a need for additional support or information in relation to use of Service Pupil Premium. The most frequent request, made by 26% of extended questionnaire respondents, was for **examples of evidence-based best practice**. There was a desire for examples that recognised the range of different school circumstances and/or the characteristics of their Service child cohort. Schools with small Service child cohorts were particularly keen to stress the need for best practice examples that reflected their situation.

Key Messages for Armed Forces Communities

- ***Engage with us***
  Around a third of respondents highlighted the value gained from networking and dialogue with their local Armed Forces community. Examples of valued support included: information on Armed Forces careers; trips and enrichment activities; officers visiting the school; joint-working between school staff and Armed Forces family welfare.
- ***Keep us informed***
  Schools appreciate information from the Armed Forces. Over a quarter of respondents (27%) felt the Armed Forces needed to provide schools with a key contact who could inform them about upcoming deployments, assist with transfers, and coordinate family welfare support.
- ***We're proud of you***
  Schools wanted the Armed Forces communities to know how proud they were to work with them. Armed Forces personnel and Service children were identified as positive role models for the school.

Key Messages for Local Authorities/Multi-Academy Trusts

- ***We value your support***
  Schools valued support they received from their Local Authority or Multi-Academy Trust, though this varied geographically. Support included: having staff dedicated to Service children; provision of useful resources; practical support to address key needs; supporting local networking between schools and the Armed Forces community. Schools looked to MATs to allow time to be allocated to these activities.
- ***We need you to be flexible***
  Schools ask Local Authorities and Multi-Academy Trusts to acknowledge and understand the needs of Service children, and to demonstrate the importance of meeting these needs by allowing flexibility in their administrative processes, data collection and data analysis.
- ***Guidance and best practice***
  Around 15% of respondents looked to Local Authorities and Multi-Academy Trusts to collate and/or signpost to guidance and best practice examples on supporting Service children, and to provide CPD opportunities around issues related to the needs of Service children.

Key Messages for Government Departments

- ***Recognise the impact***
  Some 21% of extended questionnaire respondents wanted government departments to recognise the impact of Service life on children and families, and for this to be reflected consistently in policies and government priorities. A desire was expressed for cross-departmental work to mitigate the impact of Armed Forces life on schools, such as flexibility on term-time holidays.
- ***Service Pupil Premium***
  Some 13% of schools wanted government to understand that, although the Service Pupil Premium is highly valued, it is not always adequate to meet more complex needs.
- ***Mitigating the impacts of mobility***
  Several respondents felt that government departments should provide information, support and access to additional/ short term resources to meet the specific challenges of mobility. This particularly related to the fast-tracking of SEND assessment and support provision, which was identified as an area in which Service children were particularly disadvantaged as a direct result of mobility.

Resilience and Adaptability

- A key message for all practitioners and agencies was to recognise the adaptability and resilience of Service children. These are strengths that should be built on; but may mask a need for support and/or be a barrier to engagement.

Messages for SCISS

- Schools were very positive about the potential value of SCISS. Awareness of SCISS was mixed, but those who had previous contact were complimentary, and those who had not previously heard of SCISS were typically of the view that the aims of SCISS would benefit their work.
- Direct contact with schools via email newsletter/updates were seen as important. Facilitating networking (including on-line networking), in particular for those in areas with low numbers of Service children, was also identified as a potentially helpful means of communication.

Priorities

Respondents were asked their opinion on what the SCISS NEAC's priorities should be over the next 2-3 years. The most frequent suggestions were:

- Just under 20% of respondents felt that the SCISS NEAC should focus on collating and/or signposting to **guidance and/ or best practice examples** for supporting Service children. A 'directory' to signpost to high quality support would be welcomed, with the SCISS NEAC viewed as well placed to oversee this.
- Some 16% of respondents felt the SCISS NEAC should focus on supporting schools in meeting the **emotional needs** of Service children. This included advocating for timely access to support services.
- Schools often felt that they required **funding** above the level of Service Pupil Premium, when presented with Service children with complex needs. Some 15% of schools felt the SCISS NEAC could consider its role in researching and advocating for additional targeted resources to meet complex needs.
- Around 8% of respondents felt that the SCISS NEAC could advocate for standards to be agreed in relation to **Armed Services communication with schools**, in order to build consistent relationships.
- Around 7% of respondents feel they would benefit from **high-quality specialist CPD** on specific issues relating to the needs of Service families.

Next Steps

- This report presents the findings of the SCISS *Voice of Schools* consultation. This was the first stage of the process to identify action plan priorities for the SCISS NEAC. The next step is for the SCISS NEAC to reflect on these findings, and agree a way forward.
- The consultation identified a wide range of challenges, opportunities and priorities in relation to supporting schools to achieve the best possible outcomes for Service children. There is considerable variation in the challenges that are felt to require the most support, based on the different characteristics of schools and diverse experiences of Service children.
- It is recommended that the SCISS NEAC pays attention to achieving an appropriate balance between the most commonly identified challenges and opportunities, and acute challenges experienced by particular subgroups.
- The areas of challenge that appear to have the greatest overall need for support are:
    - **Separation from parents**- in particular providing effective emotional support both during a deployment and at the points of departure and return;
    - **Communication with the Armed Forces**- in particular contact with local bases and the local Service community.
- Issues with high need for specific groups, but lower overall relevance, include:
    - Support in areas with low overall numbers of Service children;
    - Support for schools with low numbers of Service children;
    - Support for the impact of mobility. In particular, specific, practically-focussed, short-term support or targeted additional resources to smooth the transition process;
    - Support to address the potential tension between meeting the needs of Service children and fulfilling expectations made of the school, e.g. from OFSTED, in particular for schools with significant numbers of Service children;
    - Addressing areas where Service children appear to experience specific disadvantage, e.g. in relation to EHCP processes and securing SEND support.

Section 1 – Introduction

1.1 Background

Service Children in State Schools (SCISS) is a voluntary affiliated network of state-maintained schools in England that have any number of Service children on roll. A Service child is 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. SCISS aims to enhance the education and welfare of Service children, working with key partners and affiliated schools to achieve the best possible outcomes for this group of children and young people.

SCISS is led by a National Executive Advisory Committee (NEAC) comprising of: headteachers; Local Authority officers/advisers; representatives from the three Armed Forces Families Federations; representatives from the Service Children's Progression Alliance (SCiP), the Department for Education (DfE) and the Ministry of Defence's Directorate for Children and Young People (DCYP) Global Education Team.

The core purpose of the SCISS NEAC is to be the '*Voice of Schools*' supporting Service children. This involves engaging with policy makers, and identifying effective practice to share with the SCISS network of schools.

1.2 This Report

The SCISS NEAC commissioned Tiller Research Ltd to undertake a consultation with schools who have Service children on roll. The purpose of the consultation was to ensure that the group's forthcoming action plan truly reflects the areas of most importance for schools. The key lines of enquiry were:

- To identify current areas of successful school-based practice, and effective external resources, in relation to support for Service children;
- To identify current challenges faced by schools in relation to support for Service children;
- To identify key priorities/messages for stakeholders (e.g. government departments and local authorities), with a focus on developing policy and services that optimise the quality of support that schools can provide to Service children.

This report presents the findings of the consultation, based on over 500 responses from headteachers and school leads for supporting Service children.

1.3 Data Collection

The consultation contained three elements:

- **Core online questionnaire:** a questionnaire comprised of Likert-type rating scales and free text response questions. The questionnaire was promoted through the SCISS network via email and social media channels. Partner organisations supported promotion of the questionnaire to schools that are not part of the SCISS network.
- **Extended online questionnaire:** all questionnaire respondents were given the option of completing an additional set of free text response questions relating to their work with Service children. This additional question set was presented directly after the core questionnaire (above) and participants consented by opting-in.

- **Semi-structured telephone interviews:** questionnaire respondents were asked if they would be willing to undertake a telephone interview with Tiller Research to explore, in more depth, their response to the online questionnaire. When selecting interview participants, a sample was constructed that represented a cross-section of questionnaire respondents, taking into consideration:
    - school phase;
    - main Service(s) of the school's Service child cohort;
    - number/percentage of Service children on roll.

  Geographical location was also taken into account, with the aim of achieving representation within the sample from:
    - different regions across England;
    - local authority areas with different overall numbers of Service children, identified by the number of Service Pupil Premium recipients.

  A total of 17 one-to-one interviews were completed, lasting an average of 24 minutes (range 17-35 minutes). Interviews were audio recorded, with permission, and transcribed.

1.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

Descriptive statistics were produced for the quantitative questionnaire responses. Charts are provided in Appendix A. The data set was analysed using the following variables:

- Full set of responses (N=460);
- Responses by version of questionnaire completed (core, extended);
- Responses by school type (primary, secondary, special);
- Responses by main Service of Service child cohort;
- Responses by number of Service children on roll;
- Responses by percentage of those on roll who are Service children;
- Responses by local authority quintile of Service Pupil Premium numbers;
- Responses by role of respondent.

Qualitative Data

An initial thematic analysis was undertaken of the free-text questionnaire responses and interviews to identify key themes. These themes were not pre-determined, but were identified from analysis of the data set by two researchers working independently.

Following identification of key themes:

- Free-text questionnaire responses were revisited, and a content analysis technique was used to identify the number of responses that related to each theme. The percentage of respondents mentioning each item was calculated, based on 461 responses to the core questions, and 234 responses to the extended questionnaire.
- Interview responses were revisited using NVivo qualitative analysis software to further explore the nature of the themes, and develop a full understanding of the impact (both positive and negative) for schools and Service children.

The analysis considered both the nature (through thematic coding) and the volume (through content analysis) of responses, to ensure that high-impact issues of particular importance to smaller subgroups were identified, in addition to the most frequent overall themes.

1.5 Profile of Questionnaire Respondents

A total of 518 responses were received to the online questionnaire (fig 1). Of these, 461 contained usable data, and 234 respondents chose to complete the extended questionnaire.

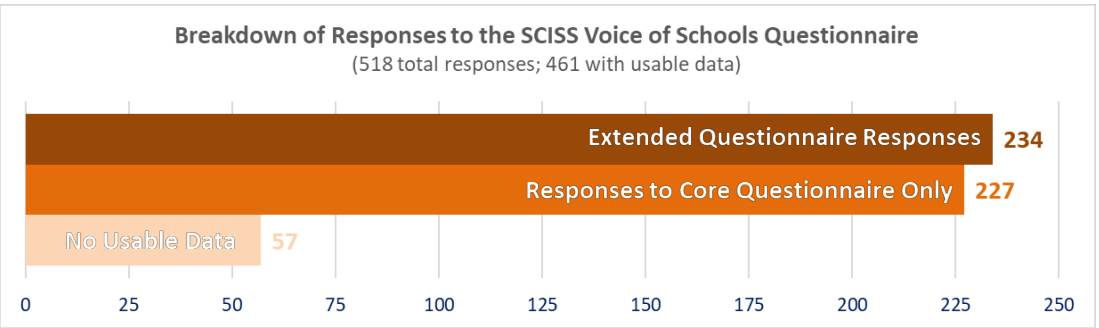


Figure 1: *Responses received to the online questionnaire*

1.5.1 Subgroup Representation

Responses were received from a wide range of perspectives, covering all of the key variables identified in section 1.4. The proportions of respondents in each subgroup were broadly in line with those in the overall population of Service children in England. A detailed breakdown of the responses received from each subgroup can be found in Appendix B. In summary:

- The majority of responses were received from primary schools, with around 1 in 5 responses from secondary schools (fig 2). This is broadly in line with the overall proportions of state schools in England (primary- 79%, secondary- 16%, special- 5%)[1];
- The majority of responses were received from schools in local authority areas with high numbers of Service Pupil Premium recipients (fig 3). The proportion of responses received from schools in each Service Pupil Premium Local Authority Quintile was broadly in line with the overall population of Service children (Q1- 1%, Q2- 3%, Q3- 6%, Q4- 15%, Q5- 75%)[2];

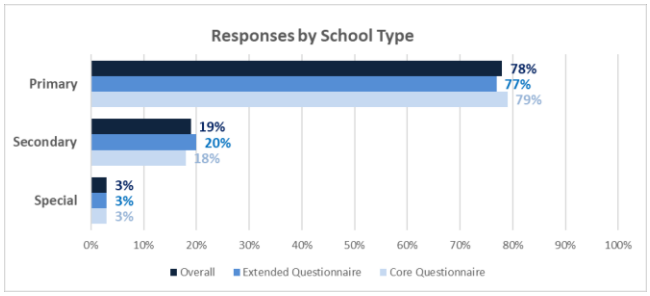


Figure 2: *Responses received by school type. 'Primary' includes 'nursery', 'infant', 'first', 'junior' and 'middle deemed primary' schools. 'Secondary' includes 'middle deemed secondary', 'high' and 'all-through' schools*

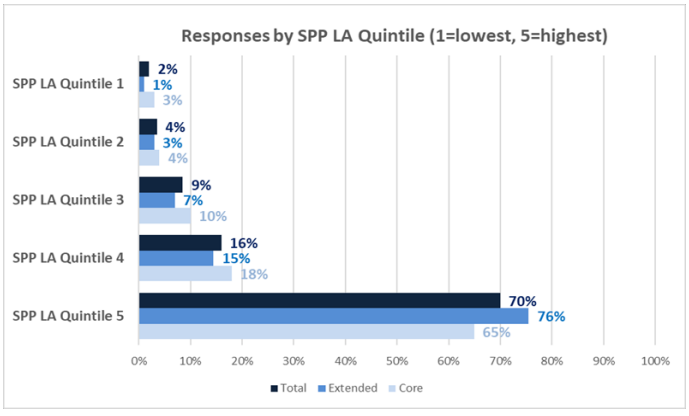


Figure 3: *Responses received by local authority quintile for number in receipt of Service Pupil Premium. Q5 areas have the highest number of SPP recipients*

[1] https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics
[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium-allocations-and-conditions-of-grant-2020-to-2021

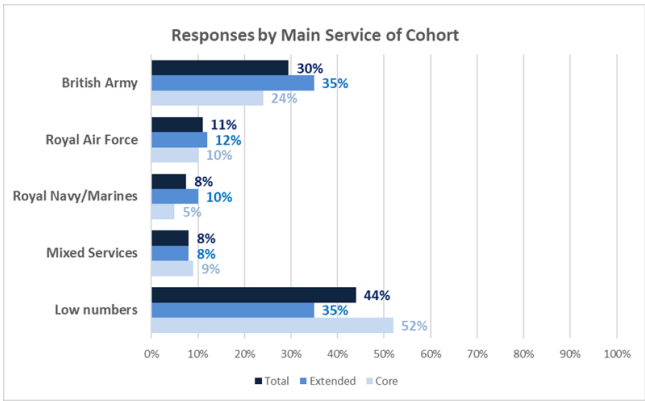


Figure 4: *Responses received by main Service of the school's Service child cohort.*

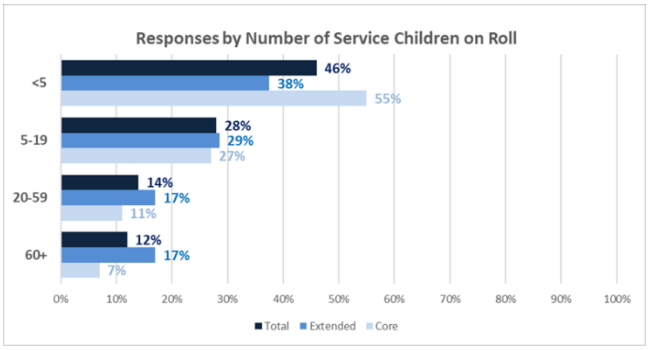


Figure 5: *Responses received by number of Service children on roll of school*

- Subgroups were created based on the Armed Forces Service in which the parents of the majority of a school's cohort were serving or had served (fig 4):
    - Just under half of the responses received were from schools with a Service child cohort linked mostly to one Service. Of these, 61% were from schools where the majority of Service children had a parent serving in the British Army, 22% RAF and 16% Royal Navy/Royal Marines. This is broadly in line with the overall proportions of current UK Forces personnel (Army- 60%, RAF- 19%, Navy/Marines- 20%)[3];
    - Schools with fewer than four Service children (*n*=201) were grouped together, regardless of which Service(s) are represented within their Service child cohort. This is because analysis indicated that their low number of Service children was of more relevance than their specific Armed Forces Service for understanding their needs;
- Almost half of responses were from schools with fewer than five Service children on roll (fig 5). The SCiP Alliance has found that 50% of schools with Service children have only one or two on roll[4], suggesting that a sample with a large proportion of responses from schools with low numbers of Service children is consistent with the overall population in England.

1.5.2 Extended Questionnaire Respondents

The profile of respondents for the extended questionnaire is broadly comparable to the profile of those who completed the core questions only. However:

- Respondents from schools with small numbers of Service children on roll were generally less likely to complete the extended version (38% of respondents to the extended questionnaire had fewer than five Service children on roll, compared to 55% of responses to the core questionnaire);
- Respondents from schools in local authority areas with the highest overall number of Service Pupil Premium recipients were more likely than those from other areas to complete the extended questionnaire, regardless of the number of Service children on roll at their own school.

[3] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/920074/1_July_2020_SPS.pdf
[4] https://www.scipalliance.org/assets/files/SCP-Alliance-data-Briefing-FINAL-ONLINE.pdf

1.5.3 Role of Respondent

More than half of respondents to the questionnaire were headteachers. However, there was some variation in the role of the questionnaire respondent between different subgroups. Details are provided in Appendix C. Notable variations include:

- Headteachers were more than twice as likely to be the respondent from a primary/special school than from a secondary school (fig 6);
- Secondary schools were much more likely than primary schools to be represented by a Senior Leader (other than the headteacher), or a Welfare or Support Professional. In many secondary schools, especially those with large numbers of Service children on roll, the respondent's responsibility for supporting Service children formed a large part of their overall role. Primary school respondents were more likely to have a much smaller proportion of their overall role focussed on Service children;
- The overall likelihood of a respondent being a headteacher appeared to be predominantly affected by factors other than the number of Service children on roll. For example, headteachers were more likely to be the respondent from schools in local authority areas with higher numbers of Service children (Quintiles 3-5), compared with schools in Quintiles 1-2, regardless of the number of Service children on roll at their school (fig 7). However, this changed with very high numbers of Service children: 68% of respondents from schools where Service children represented more than three-quarters of children on roll were headteachers, compared with 55% overall.

1.5.4 Possible Considerations

There is likely to be value in considering the profile of respondents when reviewing the results, and in particular when identifying suitable actions in response to the findings. Possible considerations include:

- The role of a school's primary contact for work with Service children may affect the nature of the information and support that they would find most helpful. Where this is linked to other key variables, it may suggest that different types of response will be required to meet the range of support needs identified for different subgroups;
- Schools in areas with high overall numbers of Service children are more likely to have a headteacher leading on this work, regardless of the number of Service children in their own school. In some cases, responses show that this was due to the previous experience of the headteacher working with Service children elsewhere. However, it was often due to the needs of Service children being a frequent topic of discussion in local networks, and so more likely to be part of a shared local agenda. This indicates that, for actions based on the findings of this report to be effective, it will be important to consider more than just the variations in school characteristics.

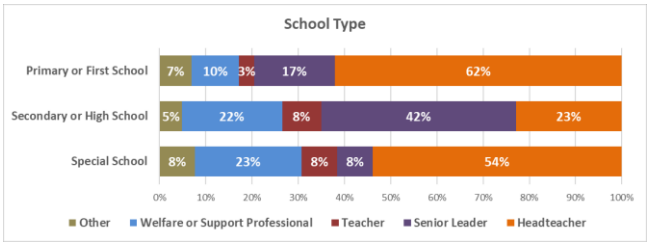


Figure 6: *Role of respondents by school type*

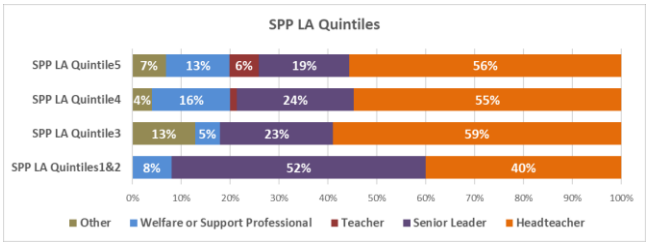


Figure 7: *Role of respondents by local authority quintile for Service Pupil Premium (5= areas with the highest number of Service Pupil Premium recipients)*

Section 2 – Understanding the Challenges

2.1 Questions on the challenges experienced by schools

This section outlines the analysis of the 461 responses to the core online questionnaire. The focus of these questions was to understand the challenges that schools experience in relation to providing support to Service children.

Quantitative Questions

Previously documented challenges experienced by some Service children, their families, and/or the schools they attend were presented using a Likert-type scale question, with five response options ranging from 'Very Big challenge' to 'No challenge':

> ***"Thinking about your school's experience of supporting Service children, please indicate how much of a challenge is presented by each of the following:"***

- Mobility (Service children moving between schools);
- Separation from parent(s) (due to parental deployment, training, 'weekending' or other forces-related duties);
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND);
- Safeguarding;
- Addressing gaps in Service children's learning;
- Engaging with Armed Forces families;
- Engaging with the Armed Forces community.

Free-text Response Questions

Three questions, with an unlimited text response, were asked to explore schools' challenges in relation to their work with Service children in more detail. Questionnaire data for these questions was combined with relevant interview responses:

- Expanding on the quantitative responses:
  "Please tell us more about the most significant challenges that you have identified above."
- Identifying additional challenges:
  "Does your schools experience any other significant challenges, not mentioned above, in relation to supporting Service children?"
- Identifying what school would find helpful to address the identified challenges:
  "Please note any suggestions you have for what would be helpful for addressing any of the challenges you experience in relation to supporting Service children."

2.2 Quantitative Responses

Respondents overall recognised that all seven presented areas were a challenge faced in relation to their work with Service children. Overall results are presented in Figure 8. This shows the seven challenges ranked in order of the proportion of respondents who viewed these as a 'very big', 'big' or 'moderate' challenge.

Supporting Service children experiencing separation from serving parent(s) was identified as the biggest challenge. Around a quarter of schools overall said this was a 'very big' or 'big' challenge (26%), approximately 50% higher than for the next three biggest challenges.

It should also be noted that challenges are not experienced universally. For all areas except 'separation from parent(s)', more than 60% of respondents said they experienced a 'small' or 'no' challenge. Free text responses provide two common reasons that schools do not experience challenge in these areas:

- schools have simply not experienced these challenges. This is often linked to the size of their Service child cohort, with several respondents noting concern that they may face such challenges in the future, but have not yet experienced them with their current (small numbers of) Service children;
- schools that recognise the potential challenge in these areas, but are confident that they have appropriate resources and systems in place to address these adequately. As such, they do not necessarily regard these areas as 'challenges' because, despite being present, they are not (currently) problematic.

Nevertheless, it is clear that a significant minority of respondents experience notable challenges in relation to their Service child cohort. This indicates areas in which focussed action from SCISS has potential to create a significant positive impact.

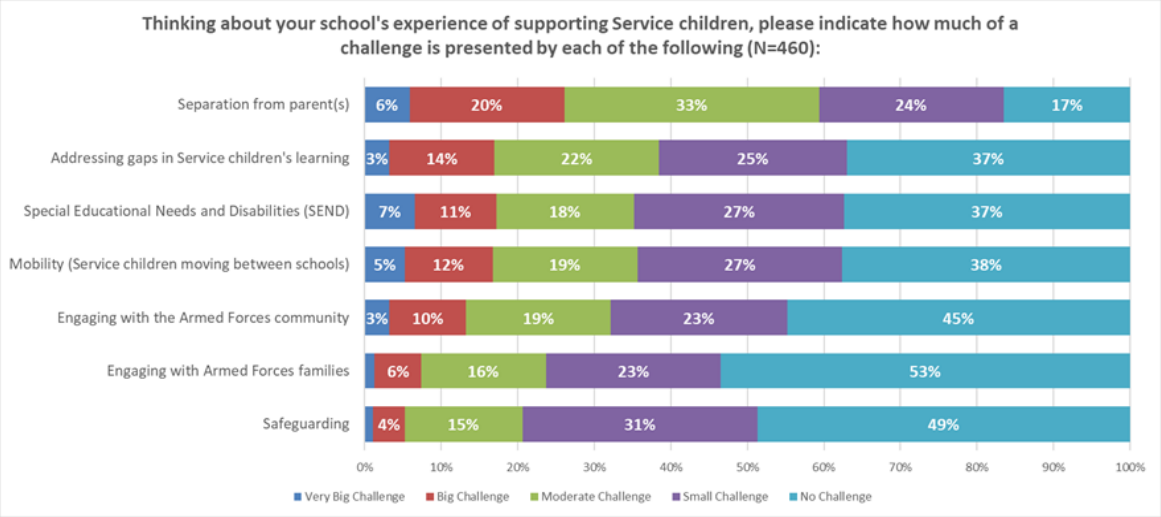


Figure 8: *Schools' experience of challenges in relation to their work with Service children.*

2.3 Subgroup Responses: Ranking of Challenges

Overall, the *order* in which the seven themes present a challenge was largely consistent across all subgroups. This suggests that the key challenges relating to providing support for Service children are not affected to any great extent by the variables under consideration. However, there were a few notable exceptions, which are explored below. Full details on the responses from each subgroup identified in section 1.4 can be found in Appendix A.

2.3.1 Variations based on Service

The ranking of challenges was consistent across the subgroups based on which branch of the Armed Forces was most represented within a school's Service child cohort, with the exception of **mobility** (Service children moving between schools).

- Among schools with predominantly British Army children, mobility was identified as the biggest challenge, with 35% of respondents identifying this as a 'very big' or 'big' challenge (fig 9);
- In contrast, mobility was the third ranked challenge for schools with predominantly Royal Air Force children, with 26% of these schools identifying mobility as a 'very big' or 'big' challenge;
- For schools with predominantly Royal Navy and/or Royal Marines children, mobility was the fifth ranked challenge, with just 9% of these schools identifying mobility as a 'very big' or 'big' challenge.

It is likely that this difference is a result of the variations in approaches used by the different Services to (re)locate their personnel to best meet their unique operational demands. These findings suggests that it would be useful to consider the impact of these variations, and perhaps consider how Service-specific responses could be developed in order to provide the most effective support to all Service children.

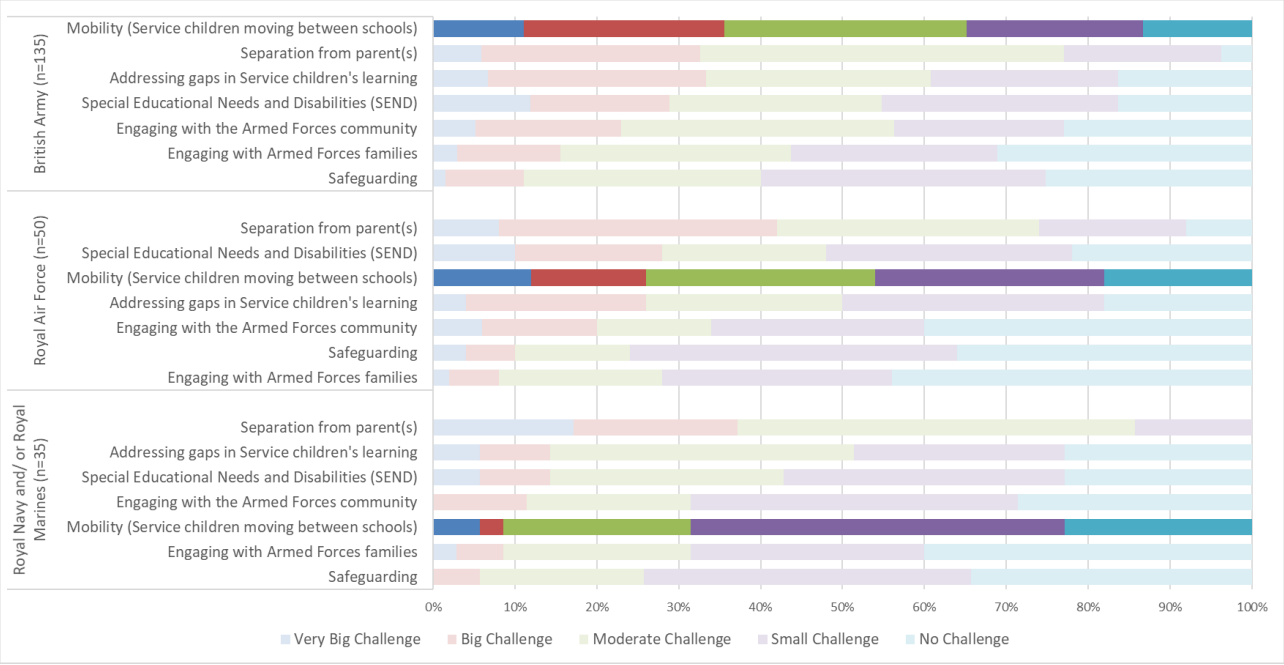


Figure 9: *Service subgroup comparisons of the ranked challenges experienced by schools, highlighting mobility.*

2.3.2 Variations based on Service children as a percentage of school roll

The relative challenge presented by each theme varied somewhat depending on the number of Service children as a percentage of the total number on roll. The key differences were between those schools with 25% or more Service children, and those with less than 25% Service children:

- **Mobility** was the biggest challenge for schools with 25% or more Service children. Some 60% of schools with Service children representing between a quarter and a half of their roll identified mobility as a 'big' or 'very big' challenge, as did 81% of schools with 50% or more Service children. In contrast, mobility was the fifth ranked challenge for schools with less than 5% of Service children on roll, with just 7% of respondents from these schools identifying mobility as a 'big' or 'very big' challenge (fig 10);
- There was also a difference in the relative challenge presented **by separation from parent(s)**. Schools with less than 25% Service children identified this as their biggest challenge. In contrast, separation was ranked fourth among schools with 25% or more Service children.

It is likely that the disruption experienced as a result of mobility is related to the number of Service children on roll. It is also likely that that some other challenges are directly affected by mobility, e.g. more than half of schools with 50% or more Service children identified SEND as a 'very big' challenge. Qualitative data identified that much of this challenge relates to significant delays and disruption in SEND assessments as a result of Service children moving between local authority areas.

Nevertheless, schools experience challenges supporting their Service children that are independent of mobility. Separation from parents is a more significant issue in schools with smaller numbers of Service children, perhaps because Service children in these schools have fewer opportunities for natural peer support/ shared experiences compared to those attending schools with a higher proportion of Service children.

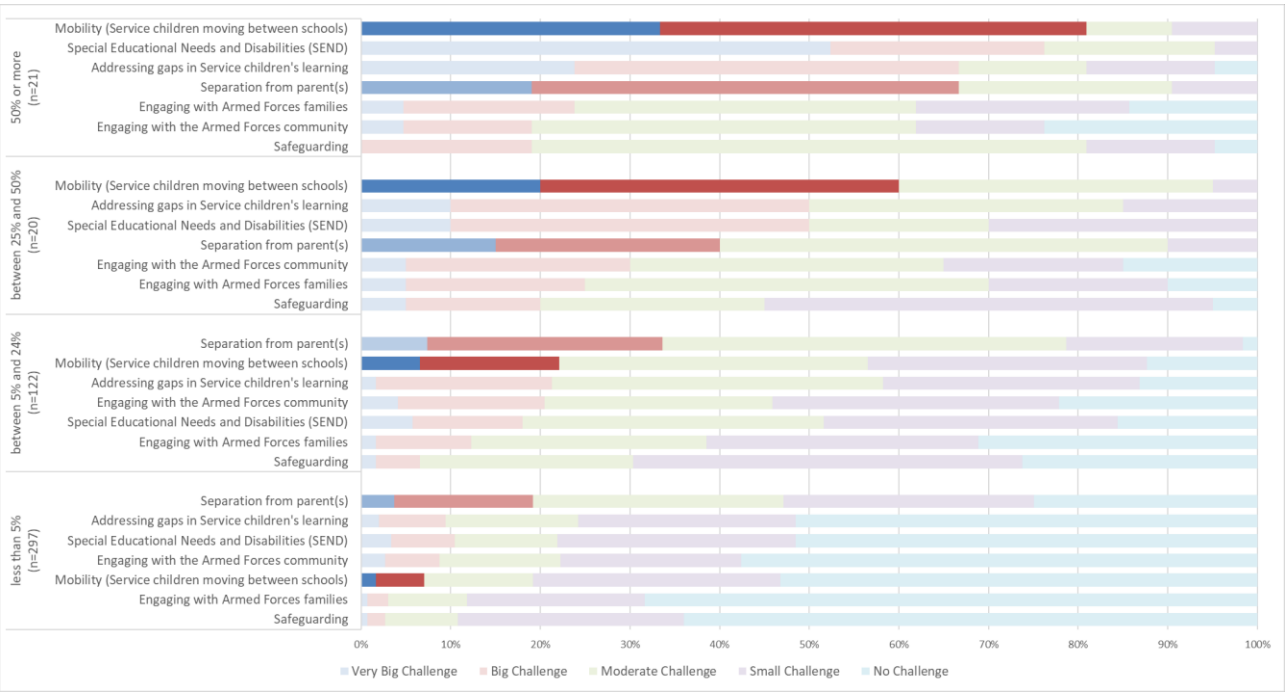


***Figure 10:** 'Percentage of Service children' subgroup comparisons of the ranked challenges experienced by schools.*

2.3.3 Variations based on type of school

The ranking of challenges was consistent across the different types of schools. There were some small variations:

- Secondary schools overall identified 'Engaging with Armed Forces families' as a greater challenge than did Primary or Special schools;
- Special schools identified SEND needs as their biggest challenge, with 'Addressing gaps in learning' much less of a challenge than for other schools.

These differences are likely to relate to fundamental features of the different types of schools, more than they do to specific issues in relation to Service children. For example, secondary schools generally have less contact with parents than do primary schools; and special schools are more focussed overall on issues related to SEND than are mainstream schools. Nevertheless, it is important to consider how these features may exacerbate specific challenges in relation to supporting Service children.

2.4 Subgroup Responses: Scale of Challenges

There were some differences in the *scale* of challenge experienced by the different subgroups. Even where there were similarities between the relative challenge presented by each theme, these challenges often presented a bigger challenge for some subgroups than for others. The full set of responses can be found in Appendix A. The most notable differences were:

- Primary schools were more likely to identify 'big' or 'very big' challenges than were secondary schools;
- Schools with a majority British Army cohort were generally more likely to identify 'big' or 'very big' challenges than those with Service child cohorts from other Services (fig 11). However, this was not the case in relation to 'separation from parent(s)', where schools with a majority RAF (42%) or Royal Navy/Marines (37%) Service child cohort were notably more likely to view separation as a 'very big' or 'big' challenge than those with a majority British Army cohort (33%);
- Schools with a mixed representation of Services within their Service child cohort were least likely to identify 'big' or 'very big' challenges. There would be value in further investigation to explore whether this is due to any specific benefit of a mixed cohort, or whether this is more likely due to these schools having other characteristics that affect the scale of challenge experienced (e.g. they were typically schools with a lower overall number of Service children);

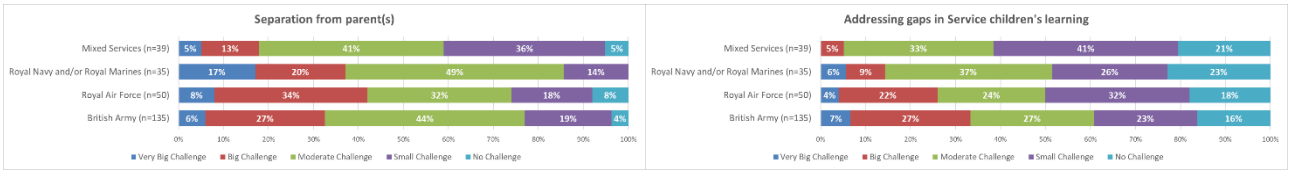


Figure 11: *Scale of challenge experienced by schools with different Services represented in their Service child cohort. For all themes other than 'separation from parent(s)', schools with a majority British Army cohort were more likely to identify 'big' or 'very big' challenges than those with a majority of Service children from other Services.*

- There is a notable difference between the two groups with a Service child cohort of less than 25% of children on roll, and the two groups with more than 25% Service children. Across all themes, schools with smaller Service children cohorts were much less likely to identify 'big' or 'very big' challenges than were schools with larger Service child cohorts (fig 10);
- Schools in Local Authority Service Pupil Premium Quintile 5 (those areas with the highest overall numbers of SPP recipients) were more likely to identify themes as 'big' or 'very big' challenges than were those in Quintiles 2-4;
- Schools in Local Authority Service Pupil Premium Quintile 1 (those areas with the lowest overall numbers of SPP recipients) were also more likely to identify themes as 'big' or 'very big' challenges than were those in Quintiles 2-4. There were some particular challenges identified in the qualitative data for schools in areas with low overall numbers of Service children, such as a lack of local knowledge or support networks to draw on when needed.

  It should be noted that there were only eight responses from Quintile 1 schools, which reduces the utility of percentage comparisons. This finding may, therefore, describe a specific pocket of challenge rather than a general challenge for Quintile 1 schools. However, when responses from Quintiles 1 and 2 are combined, those in areas with the lowest number of Service children are still seen to experience greater challenges in relation to separation from parent(s) and mobility than schools in Quintiles 3 and 4 (fig 12).

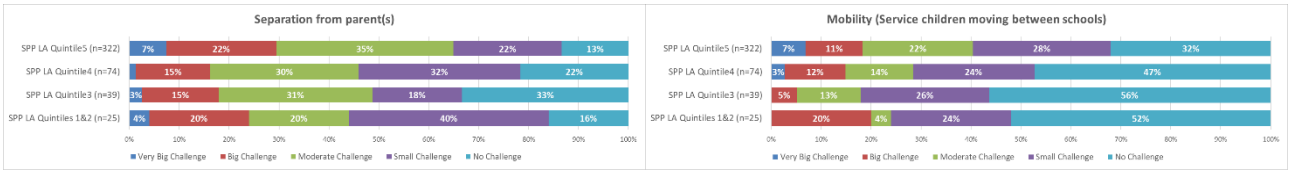


Figure 12: *Scale of challenge experienced by schools in different Local Authority SPP Quintile areas. The highest levels of 'big' and 'very' big challenges in relation to separation and mobility are found in areas with very high or very low overall numbers of Service children.*

2.5 Examples of the challenges experienced by schools

This section provides illustrative examples of the key themes of responses to the question: *"Please tell us more about the most significant challenges that you have identified above."*

2.5.1 Separation from parent(s)

Responding to emotional and behavioural changes linked to separation from a parent presented the single biggest challenge in relation to work with Service children for one in five respondents (19%). These challenges were most commonly experienced at the start a deployment, but were often present throughout a period of separation.

"The children become upset when their Dad is deployed and it can impact on their learning."

"They thought they'd be seeing their dads in six months, and then they get a message saying it's now going to be a year. That's tough… And whilst these children are going through all that anxiety their academic progress is slipping…"

"Our Service kids are impeccably behaved, as a whole. But if we do have one that has a meltdown, it is usual that Dad's gone away…"

Many respondents noted that the point at which a parent returned after a significant absence was also a time of disruption and change. This could present emotional and behavioural changes that were just as challenging, if not more so, than at the point of departure.

"…with Dad going away, things settle down, then with Dad coming back, it messes it up again. Who's in charge of the house now? Is it Mum? Is it Dad? Older brother? You get all the conflicts going on, and then it settles down again, and then it all repeats over and over again."

2.5.2 Addressing gaps in Service children's learning

Gaps in core learning as a result of Service children moving between schools was the most frequent challenge identified in this theme. This was an even greater challenge where Service children have moved between the different UK educational systems, or from overseas.

Providing **extra tuition** to fill the gaps in learning can be a time-consuming and/or financial burden for schools. Many schools allocated significant proportions of their Service Pupil Premium funding to address this issue, but did not always find that the resource was sufficient for meeting the need. **Lack of post-16 funding** for Service children was also noted as a particular issue, increasing the challenge for schools supporting Service children progressing to higher qualifications.

"We do find that children moving to our school from different parts of the UK where the curriculum varies (mainly Scotland) have large gaps in their learning."

"Movement between schools means that children do miss chunks of the curriculum… filling in gaps can often require additional adult support at a large financial cost to the school."

"I struggle with students that have gone through the system, gone to a number of schools, have gaps in their learning, get to GCSE and fail, say, English or Maths. They then go into 6th form to do their chosen subjects, but have to re-sit those exams. And while the schools will try to put in support to help them, there is no more funding then for Service children, that stops at 16. These students can still be struggling to get those grades in those core subjects. They may have excelled in other subjects, but they can't get into University without good Maths and English."

Several headteachers also told us they faced **frequent term-time holiday requests** and/or unauthorised absences when parents returned from a deployment. There was mixed opinion about whether this actually had a negative impact on learning, with several respondents of the opinion that the emotional benefits of the family having time together were more significant. However, these absences do impact on the school's attendance figures, and create a need for additional 'catch-up' support.

"Unauthorised time off school as families fit holidays around their work commitments has a detrimental impact on attendance and in turn student progress."

"Our school holidays do not match with when parents are home which means there is sometimes a need for term time holidays, however we have not seen a significant impact on knowledge or attainment due to this."

2.5.3 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Significant issues were identified in relation to the lengthy processes for assessing SEND needs. This was recognised as a universal challenge, but for Service children it was particularly problematic when combined with mobility, as relocation typically means that assessment processes have to be restarted from the beginning. Some schools explained that this sometimes means they do not even start the process for Service children when a move is anticipated, as they know it is unlikely to be completed. **This can leave some Service children without the support that other children with similar needs receive for many years**.

A challenge was also identified in relation to receiving information from a Service child's previous school when they move. Although a wider issue, the absence of information on SEND needs was identified as particularly problematic.

> *"The issue with the Service children is that if there are underlying SEN, they'll often go misdiagnosed, or it's not robustly done, because they have had too many moves for us to build up this evidence bank that we get for the EHCP. That can be very frustrating for parents and for the kids who know there's something but they've moved too quickly for it ever to have been seen through."*

> *"SEND needs can be challenging, as if a pupil moves between local authorities whilst in the process of securing further support, they lose the application and have to restart. These applications take close to 18 months which tends to coincide with the next move, meaning families miss out."*

> *"No reports are received by us from many schools abroad. I liaise with parents before they leave the country they are based in and ask them to get as much SEND information as possible: grades, examples of work to be emailed… Once families leave those schools and come to the UK, foreign schools become uncontactable to us and do not return calls or email requests for information."*

Several respondents noted that, where a Service child has SEND needs, this may increase the **practical and emotional challenges** faced by their parent during a partner's period of deployment.

> *"Those parents are then left alone to cope in challenging circumstances. They don't always have access to transport and they have to attend things like paediatric appointments and appointments with other professionals… They're great our Army families, but it can be a bit daunting if you're isolated in a place and your child has SEND because you attend these meetings, with teachers and all the rest of it, with all the language and jargon, you have to get used to this and it's really, really challenging. And sometimes these parents are absolutely worn out because they haven't got a support network, or family, nearby. So it's knowing where those support networks are. And knowing good models of practice and how to support those. And having very quick information and guidance for parents to access, so they can quickly access it and know that they're not all on their own."*

2.5.4 Mobility (Service children moving between schools)

Short notice warning of relocation, both arriving and departing, caused significant challenges. Schools reported that it was common for Service children to arrive with no educational records, or other relevant information. **Inconsistent and/or incomplete information** meant that schools faced significant challenges and delays in providing appropriate educational and pastoral support.

Mobility presented challenges in relation to the number of **available places, funding, staffing and timetabling**. These challenges were present regardless of the number of Service children involved, but increased with larger numbers of Service children moving at one time. In a small number of cases, this was viewed as a potential risk to the future existence of schools, typically those close to a barracks, base or station, but not viewed as part of that Armed Forces community. Some felt that little regard was given to the wider community impacts of these moves, including the potential loss of specialist skills and school capacity that would likely be needed in the future.

"Although we always have rough estimates for how many pupils will be arriving at the start of the academic year, we often receive many more. The transition process between schools also varies considerably. Some children arrive with detailed records from their previous school, while other children arrive with no records or very little information."

2.5.5 Engaging with the Armed Forces Community

Levels of engagement with local Armed Forces communities varied considerably. There were many **examples of excellent local practice**, but this appeared to mostly depend on the work of specific individuals. Schools with members of staff with a background in the Armed Forces often reported better engagement, able as they were to draw on their knowledge and/or contacts, though this was neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for effective engagement.

Many respondents felt that bases were more likely to engage proactively with schools in close proximity and/or with large numbers of Service children, rather than facilitating contact with all schools with Service children. However, there were examples given of some bases with far-reaching proactive engagement, and others with virtually none even with their nearest schools. The overall picture was one of **inconsistency**. Serendipity was often key: chance meetings between key individuals, or a parent with a helpful position on the base, often leading to greater success than planned or persistent attempts to build a useful dialogue.

"It takes a lot of effort and it shouldn't. I do feel sometimes, the stations, garrisons etc across the country, maybe they need to reach out to all of their local schools a little more widely… Even for me [a former officer], I found it quite hard initially to get into the garrison, to get to the wives' club, to get to putting things in the station magazine etc. It was quite a lengthy and laborious thing."

"As we are not in close proximity to a Forces base, we have no contact from the forces as to how we can best support our pupils whilst a member of their family is on deployment."

"[Our nearest MOD base] has excellent engagement with its local school but this does not extend to other schools where there are children. Being notified about deployments or other significant events that could be shared would support our work with families. A few years ago the station planned for their Family Day to take place during school term time. This was unhelpful and no coordination seemed to take place. We were 'asked' to consider approving absences in respect to this retrospectively."

2.5.6 Engaging with Armed Forces families

Engagement with families was not generally regarded as a more significant challenge for Armed Forces families than with other families, although the nature of the challenge was at times distinctive. Secondary schools were more likely to identify family engagement as a challenge than primary schools, but many noted that they were less likely to have general contact with all families.

Several schools noted challenges related to the **transitory nature** of many Service families. Lack of contact with deployed parents was regarded as inevitable. Issues such as a lack of transport sometimes exacerbated challenges related to engagement between the home parent and the school.

It was also noted that **some parents were reluctant to engage** with schools on issues related to their status as an Armed Forces family. Some families chose not to identify themselves as a Service family at all. This was often, though not exclusively, a greater challenge in schools with small numbers of Service children, and with Service leavers transitioning to civilian life.

Challenges were also noted in relation in the potential conflict of efforts to engage with Armed Forces families, and meeting the needs of all families within the school.

"I have to remember that 60% of my children are not from the Services… We used to have a big display in the entrance hall of all the Forces children and the parents, and people started to comment and say, `Alright, we know you've got Service families, but what about the rest of us?' So we've moved it all to make that a little bit more discrete now! But it's hard, you're walking really quite a fine line between how you support all families."

"A lot of them don't have transport because they don't need it normally. But we're in a rural area so it's a bit of an issue. So for parents' evenings and for other things that you get parents in for, that's problematic… We try and spend some of our pupil premium money on putting on transport for some of those parents."

"It's not that the parents are unsupportive of school… it's just that they tend to have very little in terms of educational support at home. Mum is often on her own with the children a lot of the time. And mum is often- there are plenty of exceptions of course- but mum is often not herself somebody that's educated or trained to a reasonably high level. So you're struggling against multiple layers of disadvantage."

"Parents rarely attend school events, even when organised to be held at the barracks. They can be hard to reach and this has been especially true during lock down. We regularly try to get members of the regiment to come in for events like Remembrance but often receive no reply."

2.5.7 Safeguarding

Challenges related to safeguarding were often identified as a consequence of other challenges, especially in relation to mobility and lack of parental engagement. Some respondents felt that they did not receive the information they needed from the Armed Forces community, including from welfare teams.

"Safeguarding records are not always forwarded to us when the new children arrive."

"We are finding that an increasing proportion of Service pupils need additional support for safeguarding, SEND and emotional reasons."

2.6 Other Significant Challenges

When asked ***Does your school experience any other significant challenges, not mentioned above, in relation to supporting Service children?***, most respondents provided additional information on specific issues that sit comfortably within the presented themes.

This section outlines identified challenges that may require additional consideration. In some cases, these are likely to be linked to the previously identified challenges.

2.6.1 Support for Parents

One in ten respondents (11%) highlighted challenges related to the needs of parents that impact on Service children. Examples included: **mental health needs; impact of injuries; and practical challenges faced by lone parents** (whether through permanent separation or deployment).

Some respondents pointed out that parents may be reluctant to access support available directly through the Armed Forces, fearing that this would have a detrimental impact on the career of the serving parent(s). Because of this, parents often preferred to access support available from schools or the local community. This sometimes resulted in parents having 'unrealistic' expectations of the school, which on occasions was exacerbated by misinformation received from other sources.

"It is important that we support the children emotionally when they are going through times of a parent being away from home and are also supporting the other parent who then becomes a virtual single parent."

"Mum has engaged really well with our family liaison officer, but the actual Naval welfare officer has been saying that the family won't engage with her, particularly mum, because she's worried about the impact that it will have… She was worried that would have a negative impact for [her husband] moving forward."

2.6.2 Emotional Impact

Many schools identified providing support for the emotional impact of being a Service child as their most notable challenge. Section 4.1.1 discusses how three-quarters of respondent schools allocated at least some of their Service Pupil Premium to provide emotional and/or mentoring support.

This overlaps somewhat with the themes of mobility and separation, as it is these features of life as a Service child that are viewed as the most common sources of these emotional challenges. However, it is important to note that the need for providing support for the emotional impact of being a Service child does not imply that this impact is always problematic. Service children are often viewed as being emotionally resilient. Effective emotional support can enable a resilient person to thrive in the face of challenges, and so providing support for the emotional impact of being a Service child might be usefully viewed as a core support requirement, rather than just a need for those experiencing difficulties.

"Separation and reintegration of a parent into the family can cause enormous disruption to routines and discipline. We pick up the pieces when they go away again."

"Lack of male role model and a full-time working mum sees the siblings we have become very angry and aggressive at times."

*"We certainly haven't experienced a lot of poor behaviour in school. Certainly, I've found the children are very resilient, or they **present** themselves as being very resilient..."*

2.6.3 Social Impact

Some schools felt that mobility and/or separation from parent(s) had a significant social impact. Service children sometimes experienced difficulties, or avoided, making friends. They were often less likely to engage with extra-curricular activities, and so missed out on other opportunities to socialise.

Other respondents felt that Service children had excellent social skills, but as they grew older experienced difficulties integrating fully into longstanding friendship groups. This often meant that Service children were seen to be very comfortable in social situations, but often in a somewhat superficial way.

> *"On the whole military children have an amazing ability to make friends… [But] as they get older, that gets harder… So, if we have someone who starts in, say, Year 9... Friendships have already been formed. And while it's always fun to have a new person start, actually, trying to make in-roads into friendship groups that have been formed for quite some time, that is quite hard. And then if they say to them, 'well, I might only be here for a year', other people won't invest. So, it's harder as they get older."*

A few respondents also felt the social impact increased the pastoral needs of other children, as well as those moving on, creating a significant pastoral workload.

> *"The constant movement in and out of school also impacts significantly on class dynamics and friendship circles. The pupils in our school are very used to losing friends. Often people think the transition for the child who is moving is difficult, and it can be, but it is also very hard for the children left behind."*

> *"As a school we work hard to ensure that pupils leaving have a positive experience of transition which will help prepare them for their move, but this is a very time consuming process for staff especially at the end of the academic year when many of our Service families move on."*

Many respondents felt that Service children benefited from connecting with other Service children. This was a particular challenge for schools with few Service children. It was also a challenge for those schools without good connections with local military bases or Service family networks.

> *"A lot of the children didn't realise there were other Service children in our school, they thought it was only them who had a dad who went away every six months. So now we have a Service club..."*

2.6.4 Low numbers of Service Children

Several schools with low numbers of Service children identified qualitatively different challenges and opportunities to those with larger numbers of Service children. Typically, these schools would be less likely to feel that they had the necessary experience or resource to meet the needs of the cohort, especially those with a greater level of need. There were also particular challenges engaging with the Armed Forces, both locally and nationally, with many of these schools saying that they had never had any contact and wouldn't know how to go about making contact.

It was noted that schools with low numbers of Service children were not eligible for additional funding, and that their total Service Pupil Premium was insufficient for

funding expensive support activities. There was also little scope for school clubs, trips and activities designed to meet the needs of Service children: numbers were too low for group activities, and the staff resource required for trips exceeded what was available for the number of children who would benefit.

Despite these challenges, some schools highlighted advantages of their position. Schools with very small numbers of Service children typically felt more able to provide effective bespoke support than schools with larger cohorts. It was possible for a senior member of staff to develop a direct relationship with their Service families, in a way that would be unviable with larger cohorts. Their Service Pupil Premium was often used to provide bespoke resources to meet the specific needs of each individual, which also provided an opportunity for collaborative dialogue with Service families.

Quality sources of support (e.g. through networking with schools with larger Service child cohorts) were typically seen as both important and useful for a school with low numbers of Service children to feel confident in meeting their needs. Access to this type of support varied considerably. Schools in areas with large Service child populations were generally more likely to have these contacts, as were schools with a staff member who had experience either of the Armed Forces, or of working in a school with a large Service child cohort.

The majority of respondents from schools with very small numbers of Service children reported low or moderate challenges in meeting the needs of their Service children. Some frustration was expressed that the level of Service Pupil Premium was insufficient for enabling their cohort to access opportunities such as regional events. However, many respondents valued this small, targeted pot of funding as it was sufficient for securing some bespoke resources or opportunities to meet low or moderate needs of their Service children.

Concern was expressed that the level of Service Pupil Premium would be insufficient to secure access to specialised advice or to provide effective support for more complex needs, though for most this was a theoretical risk rather than a challenge that they had experienced.

"Although there is a lot of provision for the schools where there are loads of Service children, there is not a lot of work looking at what can be done in those schools where you only have a handful… If you want to apply for an MOD grant for example, you have to have a certain number of Service children in the school."

"Budget restrictions make it a struggle to put the pastoral support in when required. We do not currently have a full time ELSA / Counsellor like some larger schools would have."

"We are not experienced in dealing with the needs of Service families and initially, this caused some difficulty in communication… The family felt at first that I was showing a lack of empathy with Service families but I am pleased to report that the matter is resolved amicably and that the family feel supported and understood by the school now."

"Small numbers mean no engagement with wider forces support network and staff lacking knowledge of military systems."

"We are very fortunate in that we have small challenges having only six pupils… we are very personalised to the individual child and their needs."

2.6.5 Identifying needs

Many schools found that identifying the needs of Service families could be difficult. Sometimes this was because families were reluctant to identify their Service status. This was particularly likely in areas with low numbers of Service children, and also in relation to those retired from the Armed Forces.

It was also common for families not to think about notifying schools of deployments, and returns from deployment. Several respondents expressed frustration at this, as they felt it missed an opportunity to plan and/or provide appropriate support.

There was a recognition that there were many possible reasons for parents being reluctant to have an open dialogue with the school. Identifying effective ways to build trust and communication with Service families was seen as desirable, but particularly challenging for those schools with limited numbers and/or experience working with Service children:

"We are not always made aware of parental deployments. Service parents do tend to 'just get on with it' and don't always realise that there can be an impact on children, and we are here to support them through this."

"It is still tricky to get parents to share their Services status - it is sometimes a year or more into their time with us that they let on. I'm not sure if this is a throwback to security concerns."

Some respondents felt that Service children had very particular needs that could be easily overlooked, but were important. This might be raising aspirations, providing academic challenge, supporting social integration, and supporting cultural capital through trips, arts and sports activities:

"We have some really able pupils come through who don't perhaps need the support that others do in the classroom or socially, and so it's making sure we use [SPP funding] for them. Because they're the ones who otherwise wouldn't get the support, if they were not Service children they wouldn't get any type of additional support. And sometimes they need extra challenge if they're really high-flyers. So it's just making sure we have our systems in place to track and check, to make sure that they are getting something from their money, the support that is due to them."

"What's very important for us is to be able to extend their cultural capital."

"Access to clubs, being able to join football clubs etc, that sort of thing, or trampolining club which actually helps them to form friendships, those kinds of groups. It helps them to embed into the school a bit quicker."

2.6.6 English as an Additional Language (EAL)

A small number of respondents identified specific challenges engaging with Service families where parents did not have English as their first language. Although this was not a widespread issue, it is likely to be quite pertinent in schools located near particular regiments:

"Being from the Royal Gurkha Rifles, the mums who do the majority of dropping off and picking up from school, their English is quite limited. So we've employed a Nepalese lady who helps us with communication. But it's not always easy. Particularly if we need to phone them up about something, we're not always clear on who we're speaking to... We get around it… it's not anything to do with refusal to engage, it's just language."

"As a significant proportion of our families are Fijian, it has been difficult to meaningfully engage and sustain communication and interaction with this group of families due to their cultural differences."

2.7 What would be helpful?

The final question in this section was: ***"Please note any suggestions you have for what would be helpful for addressing any of the challenges you experience in relation to supporting Service children".*** Just under half of the responses received were very specific suggestions related to the points above, or in some cases to elements within the extended questionnaire that are considered in more detail later in this report.

Five response themes were provided by more than 3% of overall respondents. These were:

- Greater engagement with and **support from local Armed Forces** (17%);
- Support to enhance **family engagement** with the school (7%);
- Additional support for the emotional health and **wellbeing of Service families** (7%);
- Standardisation and enhancement of processes/ information shared in relation to **transfers**, e.g. a 'pupil passport' to assist in smooth transitions as a result of mobility, minimising educational disruption and enabling effective pastoral support (6%);
- Additional funding, in particular establishing **equivalence of Service Pupil Premium and Pupil Premium**, with more guidance on how to use this most effectively (6%).

Several respondents provided examples of things that they had done that had been effective in developing engagement with their local Armed Forces community and/or families. These were all examples from schools with a large number of Service children on roll.

Examples from schools employing former members of the Armed Services in roles supporting Service children:

"They understand. It's the pastoral care more than anything, they really get it and can talk in the lingo and they understand. They understand the welfare systems of the Army and the Air Force and they understand where people can go… they get it."

"My remit when I got [my job] was to build up a relationship with the barracks. So it was going up and meeting people, the welfare officer, and just doing that… We are still recommended as a best practice secondary school. And I've had people from other schools asking me, 'how've you done this?' But they always want to put a member of the teaching staff in that role. I'm non-teaching, so I've got the time to go up to the barracks once a month and meet with the welfare officers, meet parents and discuss their worries. It's having that time…"

Examples from schools using ongoing activities and events to build relationships and open dialogue between Service families and senior members of staff:

"We mark the Forces week, Reservists Day, we raised money for the World War 1 memorial and the town trail to that... So from parents' perspectives, when they see that, they know, I hope anyway, that here is a school that values the Services and the role they've had in our past and because of that, we'll engage with it in a positive way."

"We've not been scared to use the Service Pupil Premium to run lots of activities that involve the whole family… If they can see you engaging in these slightly less formal ways, when there is an issue that might involve us, they'll say `I'm being deployed for six months, can you keep an eye on [my child], can you maybe put some counselling in place?' It becomes quite a natural progression from that little chat you might have had in the park or at the theatre, to feel now we know you, it doesn't seem like a big thing to ring up and say 'look, I'm struggling at the moment…' [Other schools say] 'we've got a big Bluey club'. But it needs to become more natural than that I think…"

Section 3 – Information and Support

3.1 Questions related to information and support

The first section of the extended questionnaire asked respondents to identify "***What information or support do you currently access that you would recommend to other schools as being helpful for work with Service children?"***

Respondents were asked to identify both *local or regional* and *national or online* sources of information and support, as a way of distinguishing between the support that is likely to be available to all schools, and support with more specific reach. Respondents were also asked to identify any gaps they felt there were in relation to further enhancing the education and welfare of Service children.

A large proportion of schools said that they had no access to information or support. Although a range of high quality information and support was identified, around 40% of respondents answering this question explicitly said that they did not currently access information or support either locally or nationally. It is plausible that a high proportion of the non-responses to this question were also from people who do not know of, or use, information and support, and so this figure may be an underestimate.

Some respondents were unaware that support was available, or had been **unable to find anything helpful**:

"None. I have looked nationally and online."

"I don't know what is available."

A few secondary schools commented that the available support was not suitable for their needs, as it was viewed as focussed on primary schools rather than the needs of older pupils:

"[We access] none. Any activities and support [we have seen] is more focussed on primary school children and is often limited. With over 100 ranging from 11 – 18, it is not suitable."

Perceived gaps in the support and information available are discussed below. However, it should not be assumed that all of the schools currently accessing no support have an unmet need. Several respondents felt they were able to meet the needs of Service children within their existing resources.

"We carry on as normal with the children, but offer extra nurture and counselling if and when it is needed."

3.2 Local Sources of Support

The most frequently identified useful support locally/ regionally were local Armed Forces (15.3%) and Local Authority support (14.5%).

Local support from the Armed Forces included provision from local military bases and welfare services. This included points of contact, opportunities for visits, and communication on matters that may affect Service children. The scope and perceived quality of such support varied considerably. Many schools, in particular those located some distance from a local base, felt they lacked the support from the Armed Forces that they thought would be useful to them.

"The local Garrison are very helpful in understanding postings or unit moves."

"A lot of schools maybe don't understand the implications of moving every few years and whatever, how that can affect the children and their education… We do a lot with the Garrison and with [the local RAF base], so we've got a good understanding. But it's important that understanding becomes a lot wider."

"There doesn't seem to be much going on. Like, if you're somewhere probably like York, you're more likely to have those opportunities. Whereas every now and then we'll get the offer of going somewhere, but it'll be somewhere fairly far and it's unlikely with it being only 4 children that you're going to travel 100 miles to attend an event… There doesn't seem enough locally that I can actually find out about and get involved with… We are not far from [our local RAF base], but I don't ever seem to get any information."

Support from Local Authorities was a useful source of support for just under 15% of respondents. However, this overall figure does not provide a complete picture. Provision varies considerably around the country, with only a few Local Authorities having dedicated provision for Service children and/or their families. In these areas, support from the Local Authority was typically acknowledged as a major source of support, and was highly valued.

"Hampshire has a Service Children's Co-ordinator who runs termly meeting with co-ordinators from the different areas of the county to share good practice."

"In York we have the 'Service Families Forum' which brings together a variety of professionals to share up to date information and expertise. This has been so valuable to us as a school. It's an excellent way of making contacts with people who can offer services to our families and provides an opportunity for school staff across York to share ideas. We are also very lucky to have the Service Families Liaison Officer for York who has been providing fantastic support to families and schools for the past five years. She acts as a link between schools and the Armed Forces and provides neutral, confidential support to families outside the chain of command. [She] has supported so many families and worked with schools across York to increase their awareness of issues affecting Service pupils and their families."

Many schools mentioned the importance of **'in-school' clubs** and the expertise of their own staff. Around one in 10 schools (8%) received no local support for their work with Service children other than these internal resources.

"When I meet with them, and I'm very open and explain to them that I have this role because I was a Service woman. They can identify with that. And they come and tell me things, like my Dad's gone away or my Mum's done this now, and I think it is identifying with people rather than feeling that they have to keep quiet about it because they don't fit in, because they've not got several people in their classes whose Dads are on the same camp, that sort of thing. You can see them opening up and being proud…"

"We run our own Bluey Club using the Service Pupil Premium. This works best for us."

"We offer a whole package to our Service children. Our Head's very pro-Service children and we want them to have a sense of identity as their own unit."

One in 20 respondents (5%) found networking with other local schools supported their work with Service children. A similar proportion (4%) identified local branches of Forces charities, and associated military-focussed organisations, as a key source of support. Both of these sources of support were very much dependent on local circumstances and opportunities.

"We rely on our networks and our relationships with local schools… We as a school have a very good relationship with [a school not too far from us] and [the headteacher] is one of our go-to people if we were struggling. And [also]… a headteacher in Dover, they've got a great number of Service children there. So we haven't come across anything we've struggled with, nothing we haven't been able to sort out with a few phone calls or questions to people locally who have had greater experience with this."

"We have carried out work with [a local charity] to support our Services children and I would strongly recommend that schools get involved with this group."

3.3 National Sources of Support

The most frequently identified useful support from national/ online sources, accessed by one in five respondents, was from **Armed Forces charities** (19%). This included accessing specific programmes for Service children, as well as information and support relating to individual issues.

"We subscribe to Reading Force - brilliant packs."

"In contact with NFF and AFF and SSAFA for information and events. The AFF magazine is very helpful."

"There is a wealth of support and information from the British Legion and their Military Kid's Club."

"Little Troopers: resources pack for Service children."

"SSAFA: support with a child with emotional needs."

"MKC Heroes is a great resource and the locally organised events are super. Having a Service pupils' club is great and has really helped the children share their feelings and experiences in a fun, relaxed environment."

Guidance on supporting Service children from **UK government departments**, was used by 6% of respondents. This included information, much of which was accessed online, from CEAS, DCYP, and DfE, and specific guidance related to the Service Pupil Premium.

"GOV.UK website and its various links to support for schools."

SCISS were mentioned by several respondents, as were **the Service Children's Progression Alliance (SCiP)**. There appeared to be some confusion about the differences between these two organisations. Together they were mentioned as a helpful source of support by just under one in ten respondents (9%). Also, around half of those identifying SCISS as a useful source of support did so as a 'local or regional' source of support.

"SCISS: Attended conferences. Very useful"

"SCIP Alliance have just developed a toolkit which is really useful."

Some respondents noted that they did not know what support these organisations offered.

"[I] just feel a disconnect [with SCISS/SCiP]… So they've got the big meetings with the ceremony, but then what practical impact does that actually have? So I have left thinking yeah, that's a talking shop, not an action shop."

3.4 Sources of Support for Mental Health

Given the emotional demands Service families often face, it is perhaps not surprising that some schools (6%) sought out specific support for mental health. This support was almost always from charities, both local and national, as statutory/NHS sources of mental health support were identified as difficult to access.

Some respondents talked more broadly about preferring to utilise support that was not specific for Service children, as this reduced the risk of Service children being 'singled out' or isolated from potential peer support. This was particularly true in relation to mental health and wellbeing support.

"We use nothing specific to Service pupils. We use local authority and national organisations, including CompassBuzz, Barnardos and NSPCC to support all our pupils."

"For all school children, you can access behavioural support and CAMHS, but they're overrun and you can't access appointments for love nor money from these people… So if there was something that could be applied for separately to what we can normally access, and was bespoke to the Service families, that'd be very helpful."

"With the dolls, we started doing the little dolls with other families as well, so it's not just about Service families, it's for anybody who has a parent working away…"

3.5 Areas for Development

A range of suggestions were made for improving the information and support available to schools in relation to supporting Service children. These included suggestions related to both the content of available support, and the process for accessing this. In some cases, there is an overlap between these elements.

3.5.1 Directory of Support

Just under one in five respondents (18%) felt there was a need for more advice and guidance in relation to supporting Service children. Specific examples of perceived gaps are discussed below. However, many respondents highlighted that their biggest challenge was identifying what support was currently available, feeling that things they knew existed were sometimes difficult to access.

The single biggest request, made by 11% of extended questionnaire respondents, was the development of a **Directory of Support for Service children**. This would offer trustworthy and comprehensive signposting to high quality information and support. This was also seen as offering a route through the often confusing array of acronyms, and help schools keep up with changes in the support available.

"My vision would be: if you are a Service family, or a school dealing with Service pupil issues, that there's one website. And that might be SCISS, where you go… A one-stop shop would be really good for children, families and professionals. And in professionals I would include representatives from local authorities and the military. So if there was something learnt, known, it could be beneficial to everybody. Why are we getting these emails all the time from different people? [You could] just set up an alert to say 'we've just updated the website.' "

"There are frequent changes to services and acronyms that leaves people very confused. An online manual of different agencies and a blurb for each would be really helpful."

3.5.2 Outcomes Data and Best Practice

Some respondents felt that they would benefit from having greater access to information and data relevant to work with Service children. This might include national outcomes data, or best practice examples from other schools with similar characteristics, which could offer inspiration and/or reassurance.

"Data for Service children is not published by the MOD. The data for free school meals children is, or disadvantaged pupils, but Service pupils, their end of key stage data, so SATS, we don't see their performance. Which is a bit of a challenge really because you get no idea what the national picture is… [if it were published] we'd know straight away if we were getting things right or wrong."

"I find it very difficult to find reliable, researched information about best value for money."

"I would find it really helpful to have up to date case studies/examples of how support is being given, especially how to use the SPP money effectively. I often find that Service families say they don't need extra support for their children - they say the children already have what they need, e.g. extra music lessons/sports clubs etc, and so unless they have specific SEND needs or very clear pastoral needs it would be really helpful to have lots of creative ideas to know how to support them further - often families just don't want their children singled out"

"Our Service children are non-mobile so it would be helpful to see what others do with the Service premium to enhance the education of these children."

3.5.3 Requirement for Improved Coordination

A few respondents felt there was a need for greater national coordination of support for Service children, and felt an 'umbrella' coordinating body could be useful. Although linked to the idea of a directory, these suggestions went further, for example by suggesting that providers should consider working together, or that some sort of quality assurance could be introduced.

"Over the years we've been advised by a number of different bodies, and I'm not saying it's not been good advice but it never seems to have been particularly well-coordinated. It's a little bit here, a bit there, a bit of that, a bit of this. And then someone might ring up and say 'have you done this, have you done that?' And there doesn't seem to be any real coordination of the support, certainly in school, that you can give to Service children... In terms of children's sport, there's the Youth Sports Trust. They coordinate all the work that goes on in schools in terms of the offers that you get from certain bodies. And I feel certain when they say 'this is a Youth Sports Trust initiative; I feel less so in the world of Service children because there's… numerous other groups, all worthy I'm sure, but I'm never sure quite where they're coming from or what the context is in which they're working."

"Too many 'competing' sources. No clear pathway. All good, but no structure."

"With schools now, schools have been broken up into all these different academies and free-schools, county schools and it's all become so much more complicated. Every so often they send through these diagrams saying 'this is how it all fits together'… that's what I need."

3.5.4 Support for Different Circumstances

Several respondents felt that currently available information and support is not necessarily relevant for their specific circumstances. Particular gaps were noted for secondary schools, and schools with low numbers of Service children.

Given the findings in section 2 that schools with different circumstances often faced qualitatively different challenges in relation to supporting their Service children, there would be value in considering in more detail how information and advice might respond to these variations.

"An awful lot of the stuff done is geared to primaries, and there isn't as much for secondaries at all."

"Any information would be useful, especially how to best spend grant when there are so few children and they display no emotional or nurture needs."

3.5.5 Greater Connection with the Armed Forces

Just under one in ten participants (9%) felt there was a lack of contact and/ or partnership working between schools and the Armed Forces. Many schools felt there was a gap in their understanding the Armed Forces' structures and processes, in particular those schools located some distance from military bases.

Building connections with local bases- or regional contacts from the Armed Forces community if there are no local contacts- would be very helpful.

"Links with parents' units or regiments… this will allow schools to be able to make positive links before there is a requirement to initiate engagement. For example, sharing what is happening within a unit or regiment during holidays, updates, tour information."

"It would be great to have a link person assigned to the school to have scheduled 'check-in' meetings to ensure that local initiatives and opportunities are not missed."

"I think it would be quite nice if they came into the school and did something with the children, that would be lovely. And it doesn't have to be just the Service children they do that with."

"Having a senior member of the Army on the governing body makes a big difference… It's just definitely saying that the school is important."

3.5.6 Improved Support for Transfers

Around 8% of respondents felt there was a gap in preparation and information when Service children transferred between UK schools, and to/from schools overseas. This relates to the challenges presented by mobility, discussed in section 2.5.4. This could mean families experience a lack of support, or schools end up needing to provide support that might be accessed from other agencies.

"It would be useful if children came with some sort of Armed Forces Passport to see where they have been and for how long. Sometimes their last school information does not arrive on time, if at all, and so we do not know much about the child other than from parents."

"It's that joined-up thinking. And to be fair, health, education, social care, none of us are good at sharing information together. The EHCP is supposed to do that, but it's very hard sometimes to get the agencies to join up. The police force as well. They have such separate systems. And you can be at risk in schools sometimes of putting in too much support, too many layers, when the needs may be being addressed by other agencies that you're not aware of who are working with the family. So it would certainly help if we had a little bit more inter-agency working where appropriate."

3.5.7 Accessible Emotional Support

Supporting children with emotional difficulties challenges some schools. Advice on how to manage emotional difficulties, and timely access to professional help, was considered a gap in provision by a little under 5% of respondents

"Further information on online support or access to other grants for specific difficulties encountered by the children, often directly linked to the circumstances in which they have found themselves, e.g. More support for children whose parents suffer from PTSD."

"The attachment issues are sky high as there are high levels of mobility and virtually constant deployment for my families. It makes it impossible for children to be emotionally ready for learning. This compounds the issue of the mobility and SEND issues. Schools like mine, with certain regiments of the British Army, need financial support quickly."

"[We need] more clear, visible resources, outside of formal ELSA sessions, that we can direct Service families to as a partnership with the school, not just 'all in school' or 'all at home'."

Section 4 – Service Pupil Premium

4.1 How Schools Use Service Pupil Premium

Almost all schools reported that their Service Pupil Premium was used for specific resources or activities focused on their Service children. The majority of responses (94%) formed five themes, with most schools giving an example within two or more of these themes:

- Emotional or mentoring support (76%);
- Enrichment activities (48%);
- Academic support (47%);
- Individualised support and interventions (26%);
- Increased staffing (24%).

The value of Service Pupil Premium received by schools varied considerably, and this was reflected in how schools made use of this resource. For example, secondary schools with large numbers of Service children were most likely to use this money to fund or part-fund a post. Schools with very small numbers of Service children were most likely to identify specific resources or activities for specific Service children based on their individual needs or interests.

4.1.1 Emotional or Mentoring Support

Three-quarters of schools (76%) used at least some of their Service Pupil Premium funding to provide emotional and/or mentoring support for Service children:

"We hold a weekly drop-in session where we enable children from Reception to Year Two to take part in a range of activities including playing, making and talking together. We call this group Forces Friends. It is very popular and each week different children attend. In any one week there may be 25 plus children out of the possible 40. Across the year all children choose to attend at least some sessions. This group enables children to broaden their friendships and support network across the school. We 'mix up' children from different classes and different year groups and think about how our lives are similar to each other; maybe our parents are away Monday to Friday, or on a long deployment or we may have moved or be moving."

"We use the funding to support social and emotional needs. We use the school counsellor, a behaviour manager, staff mentor… Staff are aware of the students that we know to be Service children and we do give them the opportunity to talk to their tutor on their own during mentor time..."

"[We mainly spend our SPP on] emotional support. A dedicated member of staff for pupils and parents."

"[They have] time to talk when dad is away, ELSA time."

"[Service pupil premium is spent on] a weekly nurture group for those who need it, and TA support to help plug learning gaps."

4.1.2 Enrichment Activities

Almost half of respondent schools (48%) used the Service Pupil Premium to enable Service children to participate in enrichment activities. This included activities to increase 'cultural capital' as well as afterschool clubs and social activities. However, it was noted that this could sometimes cause resentment among non-Service families:

"Because they live on base mostly, they have, like a self-contained community, which is fine in one sense, but it means that their access to wider cultural capital is pretty limited. So they're far less likely to go over to the local art galleries, theatres, museums, those kinds of things. They're not as likely to experience that wider cultural hinterland and because of that they can have a rather narrow perspective on things which could hinder them in terms of their future prospects, because they don't have the cultural capital to draw upon to make wider comparisons or appreciate different things that are valued in certain other careers and social circles and suchlike."

"After school clubs trips, visits, residential stays… peripatetic music lessons: drums, guitars, singing…."

"So we'll put it on our Facebook page or Twitter, what a lovely trip we had… to see the WW2 telecommunications system and we'll have some pictures on there. And then the next day, doesn't happen often, but someone will say, 'hang on a minute, my child would've loved to have gone [there]'…. and then there'll be some muttering about 'well do those Service families need the money more than I do? Does that child actually need that?' And I do have a degree of agreement with what they're saying. Because in terms of financial input… there are lots of other families in school that probably need that financial support a little bit more."

4.1.3 Academic Support

Almost half of respondents (47%) used the Service Pupil Premium to provide academic support. This includes targeted catch-up support for Service children with gaps in learning, and access to additional resources and experiences relevant to the curriculum:

"We spend this on adult support for the children to help them with their learning. The children we have are achieving well."

"A pupil premium strategy is written every year which sets out how the money is spent. It is divided between, quality first teaching, targeted support, behaviour and attendance and wider curriculum experiences."

"[Service pupil premium is spent] on catch up programmes: one of our children is 8 and has attended 8 schools and was home educated for a year."

4.1.4 Individualised Support and Interventions

A little over one quarter of schools (26%) used the Service Pupil Premium to provide individualised and bespoke packages of support and/or intervention for those pupils with a specific need:

"For trips, uniform, transport and additional emotional support as and when necessary."

"We did quite a lot for our Service children this year. Small group tutoring, [and] one-to-one tutoring… The targeted intervention is so helpful for us, but also what's very important for us is to be able to extend their cultural capital."

"We used ours to unpick some learning needs for one of the pupils and put together a little targeted learning intervention. Part of that was around self-confidence in one particular area… One advantage of having quite a small number of Service children is that you can give very bespoke provision. So it's about having an in-depth and thorough assessment of their needs and then tailoring support very quickly to that child."

"We have some really able [Service] pupils come through who don't perhaps need the support that others do in the classroom or socially, and so it's making sure we use it for them because they're the ones who otherwise wouldn't get the support… And sometimes they need extra challenge if they're really high-flyers."

4.1.5 Increased Staffing

Just under one quarter of respondent schools (24%) used the Service Pupil Premium to fund or part-fund staff posts. Through this action, schools were better able to meet the needs of Service children by having specific individuals with the time to understand and respond to the needs of Service children.

A range of roles were supported in this way. In some cases, this provided additional capacity, e.g. by increasing the size of a school welfare team, or enabling schools to reduce class sizes. In other cases, it involved creating a specific non-teaching or teaching support role dedicated to working with Service children and/or their families:

"The Service Pupil Premium is largely spent on my salary… I am a lead teaching assistant in the morning and then my afternoon job is to be a lead family and emotional support, across the whole school, the Service children are just a part of that. And so I do have the time to dedicate to it…. And I make [Service children] a priority, and senior management back that up. I also have parents that come in and make appointments just to come and chat with me if they're having difficulties, if one parent is away and there are any changes in behaviours, that kind of thing, and so I've got time to do that. So it's a specific role to meet that need really."

"Service Pupil Premium is primarily used by us for smaller classes (average of just 19 children in each class). Small classes increase the level of pastoral care and support that can be put in place for individual children and their specific needs, which may change during the year."

"A full-time member of staff (Pupil Premium Champion) works with Service pupils and their families to provide social and emotional support in addition to providing 1:1 learning support for those children who require it."

4.1.6 Other Uses of Service Pupil Premium

Mention was made of two other specific uses of Service Pupil Premium:

- **Transition Support** (3%)- specific resources to aid transition, including 'welcome packs' for new arrivals, and 'memory packs' to support Service children moving to another school;
- **Staff Training** (1%)- specialist training to assist staff in understanding and meeting the needs of Service children.

A small number of schools (<2%) stated that they integrated the Service Pupil Premium into the whole-school budget. Typically, this was added to the wider Pupil Premium resources by schools with small numbers of Service children:

"The money is included in the pupil premium 'fund' as the service fund is under £1,000 which would limit how we spend it. The PP fund is much larger and goes towards literacy and well-being support, which Service children can access."

4.2 How Schools Reflect the Voice of Service Children

Respondents were asked, ***"How do you reflect the voice of your Service children in your decisions about how to use the Service Pupil Premium?"***. A third of schools (33%) spoke directly to Service children to seek their views on Service Pupil Premium. Sometimes this was through a specific Service children's voice activity, or through informal discussions. Other schools used their Service-pupil activities to engage in this discussion, for example allowing Service children in Forces clubs (e.g. MKC, Bluey etc) to choose their club activities:

"In our Forces Friends Group we have run small projects about use of pockets of funding primarily linked to choosing activities for the club."

"We have a teaching assistant that works directly with them."

"Military Kids Club - listening and action. For our Festival of Friends project, the children designed the area and the resources they would like to see there."

All-School Student Voice Activities

Around one in five respondent schools (21%) used their general student voice activities to inform decisions on use of the Service Pupil Premium:

"Annual pupil questionnaire results feed in to how the SPP is used."

"We have a School Council that is made up of both military and civilian pupils. They work together and hold a meeting every half term."

Parental Feedback

A quarter of schools (25%) asked parents for their views on how the school should make use of the Service Pupil Premium:

"We used our Service families questionnaire to help us decide on support required."

"We run coffee mornings with military wives at the school."

"Discussions with incoming families about the specific needs of their children."

Thriving Lives Toolkit

One school said that they used the *Thriving Lives Toolkit* when planning how to use their Service Pupil Premium. This is a new resource, and so may become more prevalent in the future:

"[We're] using feedback forms, looking at data, and linking planning with the new Thriving Lives Toolkit."

No Input From Service Children

Just over a third of respondent schools (36%) did not involve Service children in this decision-making. A number of these schools did feel they would like to do this in the future, with several feeling that guidance on the most effective ways to do this would be helpful. Others felt that this was not appropriate for their cohort, typically because of their young age or SEND needs:

"This is something I would really like to develop and would appreciate information about how others engage their Service children in this way."

"This is something we need to develop in the future."

"We don't. We're an infant school."

A fifth of respondents (20%) relied mostly or exclusively on the insight of staff working directly with Service children, those who have expertise or experience with the Armed Forces, or their Senior Leadership to decide how best to use the Service Pupil Premium:

"Our PP champion has regular meetings with the children and speaks to the teachers."

"We ensure we have Service personnel on our governors and PTA association."

"I'm not sure that children always have a clear understanding of the best way they can be supported. We tend to use evidence-based professional decisions."

We try to listen to what the individual needs, but, overall, things that we do are what we have noticed as being effective rather than by consultation with the students."

"These decisions are made by the SLT and the governors."

4.3 Support and Information Relating to Service Pupil Premium

4.3.1 Currently Used

National Sources

The most frequently used source of information relating to the use of Service Pupil Premium, mentioned by 14% of respondents, was UK government guidance such as that issued by the DfE and available on the gov.uk website.

A further 12% used research or best practice guidance from trusted non-government sources, such as the Sutton Trust, SCiP Alliance, Education Endowment Foundation, and Armed Forces charities:

"We have used guidance from the government and charities. We got a write up as an example of how to effectively use SPP which was shared with other schools."

"We look on the Gov website and SCISS at what other schools have done successfully."

Local Sources

Just over one in ten schools (11%) used the expertise and experience of their staff to guide their Service Pupil Premium spending, with an additional 6% drawing on knowledge from within their local network of schools:

"I use my own experience to empathise and support families."

"Our Home-School Link Worker and her team, who liaise with other agencies to provide support and signposting to our families."

"We do not have a sufficient number of Service students to warrant this support or information. Teachers are aware of the support needed for students."

"We liaise with other schools in the area to see what they are spending the money on."

Mention was also made of information and support from a Local Authority (4%), parents (4%), and the local Armed Forces community (3%) as being used to guide decisions on how to make best use of the Service Pupil Premium.

4.3.2 Further Support Needed

A little under one third of schools (31%) use no external information or guidance on how to spend their Service Pupil Premium. Some respondents explicitly said they could not find any information, but would potentially find this useful.

Almost half of respondents (47%) did not identify any additional support or information needs in relation to use of Service Pupil Premium. Often this was because schools were satisfied with the information they had access to, but also was commonly because their Service children appeared to progress well, and / or the school wanted to maintain focus on individual needs:

"None necessary since we ensure we individually meet and address identified issues with families."

"Nothing specific as each cohort of families that we work with are different and have different needs."

The most frequent request from schools that did want further support or information in relation to use of Service Pupil Premium, representing 26% of overall extended questionnaire respondents, was for **examples of evidence-based best practice**. In particular, there was a desire for examples that recognised the range of different needs presented by Service children, and the different circumstances of schools and/or the characteristics of their Service child cohort.

Schools with small Service child cohorts were particularly keen to stress that best practice examples needed to reflect their situation. A few respondents stressed the importance of best practice focussing on projects that create **lasting change (impact)** for children:

"[We need] good examples of how to use SPP, and good examples of ways to involve families and pupils in lending their voice to this."

"More ideas on better ways to make use of the funding and case studies from other schools about what they do."

"We need informative case studies that demonstrate impact."

"Examples of best practice from schools with similar number of children in their school."

Other responses suggested:

- Concise guidance on the key principles of what was needed in relation to use of Service Pupil Premium (16%);
- Guidance on how schools could access specialist support in a timely way (5%);
- Training for staff on best practice in this area (3%);
- Guidance on how to access additional funding (2%).

Section 5 – Key Messages for Stakeholders

In order to identify how SCISS can best represent the voice of schools to key stakeholders, respondents were asked:

> ***Given the opportunity, what would be the key messages you would like to be able to feed back to the stakeholders below in relation to improving support for Service children?***

This section provides an overview of the most common themes identified by respondents.

5.1 Key Messages for Armed Forces Communities

Engage With Us

Around a third of respondents wanted to highlight the value to be gained from networking and dialogue with their Armed Forces community.

Where this was absent, schools were keen to **develop engagement**, with schools viewing constructive engagement as important for them understanding the best way to provide effective support to Service children. This was particularly important for schools with **small numbers** of Service children, and schools located some **distance from a base**, who were often more likely to feel that they lacked specialise knowledge:

"Please keep in touch with your schools - we would like to support you as much as possible."

"We try to do our best. If you have ideas about how we can further help families please let us know."

"Don't forget about us, even though we have so few forces children!"

"It would be useful if you reached out to schools […] not just schools 'local' to the camp as many personnel choose to send their children further afield."

"We would like to make further links and are open to have initiatives such as adopt a regiment/school. This would allow for support during Forces activities, events and make links."

"Making links with the Forces community would encourage positive role models who could come in and work with pupils e.g. life skills, Duke of Edinburgh, physical training etc. This would also give Service personnel a better understanding of Service children with additional needs."

Where there was felt to be existing engagement, schools wanted the Armed Forces to know how much they **value the support** their staff are able to give. Just over one in ten respondents (12%) highlighted a specific contribution that they valued. These included **serving on a school's governing body**, providing information on **careers** and the Armed Forces, providing **enrichment activities** such as having officers visit the school or **hosting trips**, and working in collaboration with local schools on projects such as coordinating with welfare support provided to Service families:

"We would like to see and experience a greater involvement to highlight the good work done by the forces and the potential for some of our children as a career."

"Thank you for your support. It is much appreciated. We have lots of parents who go the extra mile to do what they can for the school. The [officers] have always been very supportive and many have been part of the Full Governing Body for the School. The MOD have always fully supported the expansion of the school and have helped accordingly."

Keep Us Informed

Schools appreciate **information** from the Armed Forces. Over a quarter of respondents (27%) felt the Armed Forces needed to provide schools with a key contact who could inform them about **upcoming deployments**, assist with **transfers**, and coordinate family welfare support.

Schools also requested information about **how local regiments work**. For example: **internal structures**, **command chains, welfare** and **Armed Forces community** activities:

"Proactively engage in outreach with schools and develop a working link with schools that serve their personnel and local need, rather than wait to be contacted."

"Someone who is linked to the school regularly. Someone who will come in and talk about the difficulties surrounding being a Service child."

"[We need] good and speedy transfer of information between schools. School also appreciates knowing when parents are deployed or away from home. We are not always told and important mental health and wellbeing support for children is missed."

Around 6% of schools wanted to ask the Armed Forces to help them to engage with Service families. This included actions such as providing parents with an accurate understanding of the Service Pupil Premium, and encouraging families to make their Service status and needs known, so that schools can provide appropriate support:

"[Families should know] that the Service Pupil Premium is not for funding things for each child such as laptops and uniforms."

"Encourage parents to engage with the school ensuring they know as much about their children before they start and keep us informed along the way of things such as deployments."

"Communication is key - more engagement will help us to help the families."

We're Proud of You

Schools wanted the Armed Forces communities to know how proud they were to work with them. Armed Forces personnel and Service children were identified as positive role models for the school.

Several respondents were keen to reassure their Armed Forces communities of their commitment to excellent provision and meeting needs of Service children/families. This was sometimes expressed through explicit reference to the Armed Forces covenant, or a desire for Service families to be confident that the school is committed to 'paying them back' in recognition of their Service status:

"We are proud of you and will do our utmost to make your transition as smooth as possible (hence our over subscription criteria)."

"We love being involved with you and are incredibly proud of you… You are such amazing role models for our students."

"We truly vale the work of our HM Armed Forces community and want to work with parents and the wider community to support the children and young people."

"We offer excellent pastoral and academic support for Service pupils. Headteacher is a retired officer and previously an army wife… This school places a strong emphasis on wellbeing, has excellent links with external agencies, and all staff receive pastoral training."

5.2 Key Messages for Local Authorities / Multi-Academy Trusts

We Value Your Support

Schools who felt they received support from their Local Authority or Multi-Academy Trust valued this highly. This included having staff dedicated to Service children who could be contacted for advice or provided useful resources, and other practical support to address key needs:

"The setting up of the military youth forum has raised the profile of Service pupils within our school."

"Our local authority have invested heavily in the school to the tune of about £3,000,000 as we have expanded… We have had lots of building works with a new hall planned for next term! Their support has been much appreciated."

"My Multi Academy Trust […] offers support by trying to support with financial bids and utilising expertise across our schools."

"[Local Authority] Service Pupils Champions: You are amazing, keep up the great work!"

The most commonly given message (17%) was that local networking was highly valued as it enables schools to share ideas, resources and best practice examples. Schools looked to local authorities to facilitate networking between schools and the Armed Forces, Service Pupil Champions, local schools, agencies, and charities; and looked to MATs to allow time to be allocated to these activities.

Networking across county boundaries was also suggested, along with signposting schools to local and national sources of support:

"Schools need to work together to share support - especially when there are only a few Service children in a school."

"More county wide events for Forces children, and ensuring that staff are afforded to the time to support."

"Would be nice to have some community link up days for the Service children to meet across schools."

"Develop outreach services and collaboration of various schools who have Service children."

We Need You to be Flexible

Schools ask Local Authorities and Multi-Academy Trusts to acknowledge and understand the needs of Service children, and to demonstrate the importance of meeting these needs by allowing flexibility in their administrative processes, data collection and data analysis.

Mid-year, often rapid, mobility impacts on roll numbers, attendance, tracking and performance data. Mid-term holidays are often requested by parents returning home, which are seen as important for the emotional wellbeing of Service children and their families. Flexibility is needed if schools are to meet the needs of Service families:

"[We need to acknowledge] that these children need significant support and the reasons why."

"Social services must take care regarding safeguarding- frequency of moves allows [Service children] to slip through the net."

"The children benefit from knowing they have support within the academy from adults and other Service Children. They enjoy being recognised as having a Service background and the difficulties they can face because of their situation."

Some 15% of respondents suggested that this flexibility also involved providing practical support to address key issues, both short term and long term, , such as transfers, PAN, and the need for additional funding. Where this flexibility was evident, it was highly valued:

"Keep up the good work as I think our Forces Pupils are championed and shown to be in great focus."

"Support implementing the covenant when this results in numbers being over PAN."

"Help the families with admissions and school moves, many of ours who move between counties encounter difficulties and big challenges in ensuring school places."

Guidance and Best Practice

Around 15% of respondents looked to Local Authorities and Multi-Academy Trusts to collate and/or signpost to guidance and best practice examples on supporting Service children. Schools feeling that they had Local Authority or Multi-Academy Trust support was often linked to perceived flexibility and practical support to address key challenges. This linked to the 6% of respondents who looked to Local Authorities and Multi-Academy Trusts to provide CPD opportunities around issues related to the needs of Service children:

"Help the families with admissions and school moves, many of ours who move between counties encounter difficulties and big challenges in ensuring school places."

"Provide much more guidance and training for all schools around Service pupils regardless of whether they currently have them on roll or not."

5.3 Key Messages for Government Departments

Recognise the Impact

Around one in five extended questionnaire respondents (21%) wanted government departments to **recognise the impact of Service life on children and families**, and for this to be reflected consistently in policies and government priorities. This also included a need to collate data to better understand needs and identify evidence-based responses:

"Think about the children when posting forces personnel, be compassionate of their needs."

"Work collaboratively with Service children moving from overseas to the UK. It is essential that smooth lines of communication and mechanisms to do this are in place-especially for Service pupils with SEND and their families who need to enter into the EHCP process."

"Ofsted and the DfE should track and report on the progress of Service children in the same way they do for disadvantaged children to give the public confidence the premium is well spent, but also to provide an evidence base for which schools are performing the best with Service children, and why."

"A centralised system collecting all necessary information regarding school performance accessible to all schools with Service children would prevent the lack of information that sometimes causes a delay in effective support for these children."

Around 12% of schools wanted cross-departmental recognition of the **impact of Service life on schools**, especially those with high numbers of Service children. Schools stressed that they needed better support and understanding from government departments to mitigate these challenges. This includes recognising the realities of Service life within expectations made of schools, such as showing flexibility over attendance/term-time holidays when linked to a parent's deployment:

"Fund properly, and ensure OFSTED understand the reality for schools."

"Appreciation of mobility and the effect that has on accountability measures. Unfair to be judged this way."

Service Pupil Premium

Some 13% of schools wanted government to understand that, although the Service Pupil Premium is highly valued, it is not always adequate.

Several respondents felt that it would be more appropriate if Service Pupil Premium was set at the same level as Pupil Premium. The current level was typically viewed as adequate for meeting low-level needs, but insufficient for meeting more complex needs. Some felt that schools need to be able to access additional funds when required, in particular at times of greatest challenge, such as imminent or recent mobility:

"Value the Service Pupil Premium - it does benefit our children."

"The Service premium is very small compared with the deprived pupil premium; more parity would enable more to be done."

"The obvious one is: more money. Counselling and/or therapy are not cheap."

"To be able to support the children the continued funding is required. Where possible the opportunity to request special funding for events that would bring the wider Services community together, such as a Forces Fun Day between small school communities."

A similar proportion (12%) requested more guidance from government on effective support and use of Service Pupil Premium. Schools emphasised that such guidance must recognise the particular challenges faced by schools with low numbers:

"The Service Premium funding needs to continue and all schools should have a lead professional for Service students regardless of if there are 1 or 200 Service pupils at the school."

"A little more information from the DfE about effective ways to spend the funding would be helpful."

Mitigating the Impacts of Mobility

Around one in 20 respondents (6%) felt that government departments should provide information, support and access to additional/ short term resources to meet the particular challenges of mobility. This related both to impacts on Service children, and also to impacts on schools, for example having to deal with large fluctuations in numbers.

Some 4% of schools suggested that fast-track support should be made available when needed for Service children to ensure they are not disadvantaged. This particularly related to the **fast-tracking of SEND assessment** and support provision, which was identified as an area in which Service children were particularly disadvantaged as a direct result of mobility:

"Communicate relevant funding streams to all schools."

"Funding and information needs to come through quicker as it often delays the student's transition and learning."

"These children suffer, especially if they have SEN, because the system of gathering information for an EHCP is often not completed before the family moves on. Exactly how this is done differs from Local Authority to Local Authority… These children need a fast track system.".

5.4 Key Messages for Other Organisations

All Practitioners and Agencies

Few schools had messages for other agencies. However, several wanted to highlight some key messages for all practitioners/ agencies working with Service children:

- Recognise the **adaptability** and **resilience** of Service children. These are strengths that should be built on; but may mask a need for support and/or be a barrier to engagement;
- Ensure **schools are aware** of support you provide. It can be challenging for schools to know what support is available for Service children and families;
- Online support is needed for Service families to access easily wherever they are. Online tools can provide continuity;
- **Work together**- agencies need a joined-up approach when working with Service families.

"Service children are more resilient, more able and more adaptable than you think. They don't want to be singled-out."

"It all needs joined-up thinking."

"We would like to receive suggestions for how things could be done differently to improve support for Service children."

Healthcare / NHS / Welfare Services

Significant gaps were identified in relation to the continuity of records in relation to health and welfare. To some extent, these issues result from the structural relationships of these services, e.g. national government vs local provider responsibilities; local government vs health provider responsibilities; statutory vs non-statutory provision.

Several respondents felt that the NHS and Social Services need to create systems ensuring **effective transfer of records,** and **continuity of provision**. These must work across county, UK nations and international borders.

"The NHS: To make sure that all areas of concern are passed onto schools so that we know in advance of any worries or concerns we can support with. This should include mental health of all members of the family."

"CAMHS teams: make Service families a priority with access to swift diagnosis and support."

"SEND services: we need a better understanding of the challenges families face when trying to access support."

Charities and Community Groups

Several respondents wanted to express their gratitude for the resources from national charities and support from local groups. Some areas were identified where local groups may be best placed to provide assistance.

"Thank you... What a super group and super support for reading and family engagement."

"…a great resource and the local events are super."

"Local community leads where the majority of Service people are from other countries."

"Sports organisations, such as soccer and Rugby Union – please support schools with Service children at cost or no charge, as through sports communities come together."

Section 6 – Impact of Covid-19

Extended questionnaire respondents were asked if they felt that the Covid-19 pandemic had affected the challenges and opportunities in relation to their work with Service children. The majority of the data collection was undertaken towards the end of July 2020. At this point, physical attendance at English schools had not resumed for the majority of children. Although most respondents noted considerable challenges as a result of the pandemic, over half of the respondents to this question reported that these had been general challenges that were not notably different for Service children:

"We managed to continue to communicate and fund some children to have extra tuition."

"No perceived difference, in our extremely small school, between Service pupils and civilian pupils."

"[This has] affected all of the children."

"Everyone was treated the same and received a full academic virtual curriculum."

It is also clear that there was a wide variation in the level and nature of the disruption experienced: some schools had continued in-person teaching throughout, treating Service children as 'key worker' children; some schools had delivered a full virtual curriculum; some schools had been able to maintain very little contact with their Service children; some had been able to continue specific support for Service children, whereas others had not.

6.1 Additional Challenges from Covid-19

Disruption and Isolation

The most common issues identified were short notice changes in deployment. Several schools reported disruption due to delays in planned postings, details of which were now unclear. In other cases, parents' deployments had been extended.

Combined with disruption to the delivery of education, many Service families were facing increased pressures, including: increased isolation, less contact with school, increased safeguarding concerns:

"It has heightened their isolation from their families, and the anxieties of not being able to help them, or be helped."

"Families where dad is away have seemed very vulnerable and isolated."

"There are challenges for all children and schools are having to provide extended mental health and wellbeing support for all children. For Service families, where a parent is deployed during these challenging times, this need is even greater."

"Some Service families have worked well with us whereas others have struggled, and safeguarding concerns have been raised."

Reduction in Pastoral Support

Around one in 20 schools felt that pastoral and mental health support had been reduced. The concern was that this would likely result in increased need down the line:

"COVID - 19 has had a huge impact, families have been living in areas away from loved ones, isolated in a place they don't necessarily know and have missed out on both academic and

social aspects of school. Once children return to school there is going to have to be a huge change in priorities due to the emotional impact on both pupils and parents. Funding into the SEMH services needs to be a priority."

"Some children required weekly meetings as pastoral support and have missed the opportunity to share their emotional needs. Again just the need for funding to allow this to continue into the future as it is essential that the children's emotional wellbeing is secure."

Greater Impacts on Service Children

Most children had experienced reduced peer contact/ peer support as clubs and other activities had been postponed or cancelled. For Service children, this meant they had not been able to access tailored support, despite facing similar or increased challenges:

"We usually run in school community events for our Forces Families and attend community events. With these gone they have reduced the opportunities to bring the Forces Friends community in our school together."

"COVID-19 has really affected the way we work with our Service children and families although we have been in touch with all of them. Some of their parents have had to go on deployment during this time."

Around 3% of respondents noted that engagement from Service families had been notably lower than for other groups during this period:

"They have engaged far less in their remote learning that any other pupil group."

"Parents of Armed Service children have not all taken up opportunities of returning their children to school, and home learning is quite limited across a range of subject areas. Communications are forthcoming from the school but not often responded to or initiated by parents and this will have a significant effect for children."

"Our Service children have been one of the lowest participants in home learning during this time."

6.2 Possible Opportunities from Covid-19

A few schools noted some benefits that had come from the pandemic. For 6% of schools, Service children had continued to attend school as their parents were considered to be key workers. This continued contact had mitigated some potential issues, and had enabled more attention to be paid to their individual needs. Others reported that some Service families had benefitted from increased family time.

A small number of schools identified benefits from remote contact that they hoped to be able to expand upon in the future. In particular, greater contact had been made with families moving into the school by using video conferencing and/or developing 'virtual tours' of their school:

"Families have really bonded together and enjoyed learning together - Service parents have been able to spend quality time with their children throughout lockdown."

"There are now more opportunities to offer Zoom sessions for Service pupils coming to the school in the future."

Section 7 – Messages for the SCISS NEAC

The final section of the questionnaire asked respondents to provide comments for the SCISS NEAC, both reflecting on the past and preparing for the future. It was notable that many respondents had not previously heard of SCISS. These respondents were typically very positive about the potential value of SCISS, noting that the stated aims would benefit their work. Those respondents who had previous contact with SCISS were complimentary, and grateful for any support that had been provided. Several respondents from both groups noted that it was a privilege to work with Service families, noting the ways in which Service children contribute to enhancing their school community. Anything that SCISS might be able to do to help schools build on these positive elements, and help mitigate the challenges, was welcomed.

7.1 How else might the SCISS NEAC communicate well with schools?

Almost half the respondents who answered this question (46%) were keen for the SCISS NEAC to communicate directly and regularly with them, highlighting useful information, best practice and new developments. The most popular method was by regular updates / newsletters (27%), with 16% favouring emails.

It was noted that direct delivery to a named contact significantly increased the probability that communications would be recognised as important:

"Regular newsletters and updates - this is the first time I have heard of this."

"Direct, school-friendly communications."

"Regular updates - this is the first time I have received anything!"

"Monthly or termly newsletters to signpost schools to grants or support for SCIE and with key useful information or contacts so that schools are empowered to continue working with local Armed Service communities (both parents at home as well as parents on deployment or posting)."

"Regular updates, news, ideas, events locally. Any recommendations on what good practice looks like."

"Find the correct person to contact in each school rather than sending information to a generic office address. Promote your role more effectively to schools – what can you do to support us?"

Just under 11% of schools who answered this question would like virtual events, such as online conferences or Zoom activities/ events, representing 5% of the overall respondents. These methods of engagement were seen as particularly useful for those in areas with low numbers of Service children:

"Online conferences/ webinars so that funding does not have to be used to attend."

"Remote sessions we can just dial into."

"Webinars for support / information and ideas on specific things - transition / deployment etc..."

7.2 What should the SCISS NEAC focus on in the next 2-3 years?

Guidance and/or Best Practice Examples

Just under 20% of respondents felt that the SCISS NEAC should focus on collating and/or signposting to guidance and/ or best practice examples for supporting Service children.

There was felt to be a need for guidance around general challenges faced by Service families, and for filling perceived gaps in current guidance, e.g. supporting non-mobile families, small Service cohorts, or working with families located off-base or living far from an Armed Forces base. Noting that the individual experiences of Service children vary considerably, there were requests made for support to accurately assess children's individual needs.

A '**directory**' to signpost to high quality support would be welcomed, with many respondents suggesting that the SCISS NEAC would be well placed to identify a suitable partner to oversee this, if not coordinate and maintain such a resource directly.

Emotional Support

Some 16% of respondents felt that the SCISS NEAC should focus on supporting schools in meeting the emotional needs of Service children. This included advocating for timely access to services, as schools often stated that meeting complex needs of Service children was too much for the in-school ELSA provision. Schools would appreciate support in needs-assessment, as well as in signposting to charities and services who understand the needs of Service families.

Funding and Targeted Resources

Schools often felt that they required funding above the level of Service Pupil Premium, when presented with Service children with complex needs. Some 15% of schools felt the SCISS NEAC could consider its role in researching and advocating for schools' additional funding needs. Particular issues raised requiring extra financial support included:

- Mitigating the impact of movement/ transfers on roll numbers, which can create funding challenges, and in some limited examples threaten the viability of schools;
- Identifying and meeting SEND needs, in particular disruptions to referral processes;
- Funding post-16 educational support;
- Supporting families in need (e.g. mental health support; wrap-around care; school trips; uniform costs);
- Support for schools with small Service child cohorts, who in many cases are unable to engage with trips and events within the currently available resources;
- Support post-COVID return;
- Non-parity of FSM and SPP.

Building Consistent Relationships with the Armed Services

Around 8% of respondents felt that the SCISS NEAC could advocate for standards to be agreed in relation to how the Armed Services communicate with schools. This included developing more consistent local contacts, and greater consideration made to keeping schools informed of factors that are likely to have an impact on Service families.

Some felt that consideration should be given to the school year when planning moves, and that a greater appreciation was required of the impact of mobility. Others recognised that operational demands take priority and cannot always be planned in advance, but that effective communication, and the Armed Forces working together with schools on a local and national basis, would make a valuable contribution towards mitigating the impacts.

High Quality CPD

Around 7% of respondents feel they would benefit from high-quality specialist CPD on specific issues relating to the needs of Service families. Schools expressed a desire for CPD to be available both face-to-face and online. The SCISS NEAC may have a role in identifying providers, and in signposting schools to appropriate CPD activities. Topics on which schools felt CPD was needed include:

- Awareness of the Armed Forces lifestyle, and its potential impact on families;
- Communicating with families;
- Providing emotional support (e.g. working with attachment and separation anxiety; supporting specific groups, e.g. boys, teens; bereavement support);
- Governors' training.

Other Suggestions

A range of other suggestions were made for areas that the SCISS NEAC should prioritise. Those mentioned by around 5% of respondents were:

- Facilitating collaboration and shared learning between schools. An online forum might support this;
- Developing ways of managing the problems Service families face in accessing SEND support and/or securing complete transfer records;
- Support for accessing quality interventions for a range of non-emotional issues Service children face, including improving attendance;
- The SCISS NEAC might facilitate good quality research into the impact of mobility on Service children, on suitable interventions, and on work that promotes the voices of Service children.

Section 8 – Concluding Remarks

This report has presented the findings of the SCISS *Voice of Schools* consultation. This was the first stage of the process to identify action plan priorities for the SCISS NEAC. The next step is for the SCISS NEAC to reflect on these findings, and agree a way forward. This section provides some brief recommendations for how this next stage may be undertaken most effectively.

8.1 Suggested Next Steps

The following stages are suggested for progressing this project to completion:

1. Each member of the SCISS NEAC to consider the findings of this report, and to record their personal reflections;
2. Tiller Research to collate the responses from individual members of the SCISS NEAC, and prepare discussion points;
3. The SCISS NEAC to hold a facilitated group discussion to explore the discussion points, and agree a draft set of priorities and/or options for action;
4. Additional consultation to be undertaken on the draft priorities/options with strategic stakeholders, as required;
5. The SCISS NEAC to review feedback, and finalise the plan for future action.

8.2 Recommendations for Key Considerations

The consultation has identified a wide range of challenges, opportunities and priorities in relation to supporting schools to achieve the best possible outcomes for Service children. There is considerable variation in the challenges that are felt to require the most support, based on the different characteristics of schools and diverse experiences of Service children.

It is recommended that the SCISS NEAC pays attention to achieving an appropriate balance between the most commonly identified challenges and opportunities, and acute challenges experienced by particular subgroups. Key points to consider include:

- There is a high demand for easy-access **signposting to best practice guidance**/ information/ sources of support;
- Some thought is likely to be needed on the relative importance of Service children to overall school priorities, how this affects the status of the lead for Service children in a school, and consequently the nature of support required (see section 1.5.4);
- **Areas of challenge that appear to have the greatest overall need for support:**
  - ***Separation from parents***- in particular providing effective emotional support both during a deployment and at the points of departure and return;
  - ***Communication with the Armed Forces***- in particular contact with local bases/ parents' units that could enhance support to Service children through greater understanding from school of likely current/imminent factors that may impact on Service children; and also a celebration and optimisation of positive impacts;

- **Issues with high need for specific groups, but lower overall relevance:**
  - The biggest current gap in support appears to be in areas with low overall numbers of Service children. This is distinct from individual schools with low numbers on roll, but in areas with higher numbers of Service children. This second group often have access to local networks that are highly skilled and knowledgeable about work with Service children, a resource that is rarely available to the former group;
  - There is also a need for specific support for schools with low numbers of Service children. This typically requires responses to more specific individual needs and opportunities, by schools who often lack specific skills or experience in this area;
  - Support for the impact of mobility. Although mobility is widely recognised as an area of challenge for Service children, many schools identified a need for specific, short-term, practically-focussed support. In particular, there was felt to be a need for targeted additional resources at the point of arrival or departure, in order to smooth the transition process;
  - There is felt to be a need for more widespread and meaningful recognition of/ response to the impacts on a school of having significant numbers of Service children. In particular, some felt that specific action was required to address the potential tension between meeting the needs of Service children and fulfilling expectations made of the school, e.g. from OFSTED;
  - There was also felt to be a need for greater recognition of, and commitment to address, areas where Service children appeared to experience specific disadvantage, e.g. in relation to EHCP processes and securing SEND support.

Appendix A - Quantitative Questionnaire Responses

The charts in this appendix show the responses received to the following question:

Thinking about your school's experience of supporting Service children, please indicate how much of a challenge is presented by each of the following:

- *Mobility (Service children moving between schools)*
- *Separation from parent(s) (due to parental deployment, training, 'weekending' or other forces-related duties)*
- *Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)*
- *Safeguarding*
- *Addressing gaps in Service children's learning*
- *Engaging with Armed Forces families*
- *Engaging with the Armed Forces community*

Respondents were given a choice of five response options:

- ***Very Big challenge***
- ***Big challenge***
- ***Moderate challenge***
- ***Small challenge***
- ***No challenge***

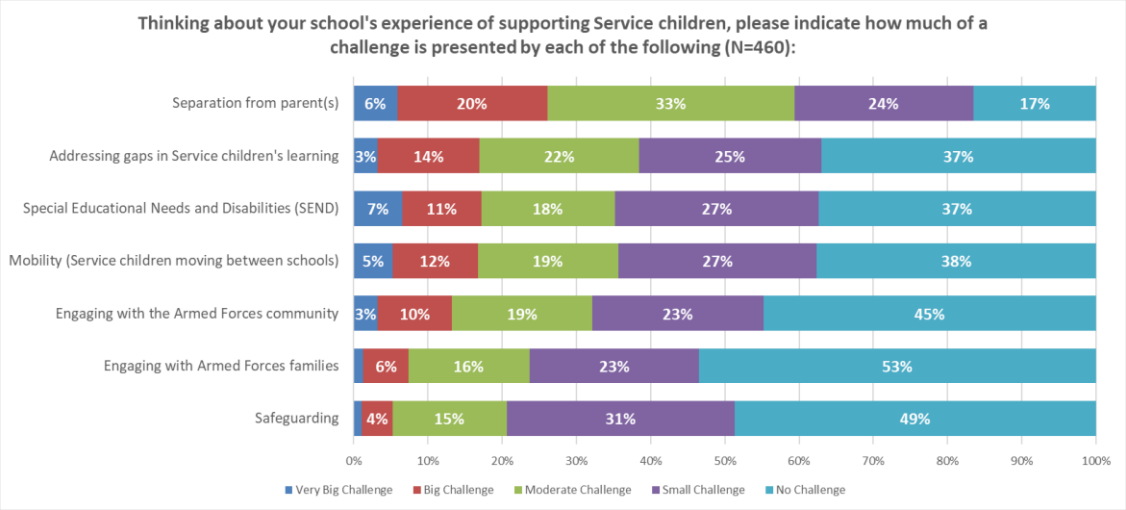
The first set of charts show the overall responses. Subsequent charts show the responses from different groups of respondents, using the variables identified in section 1.3. Two sets of charts are provided for each variable:

- ***Responses of each subgroup, showing the relative challenge of each of the seven presented areas for each group of respondents***
- ***Comparison between the responses of each subgroup within the variable***

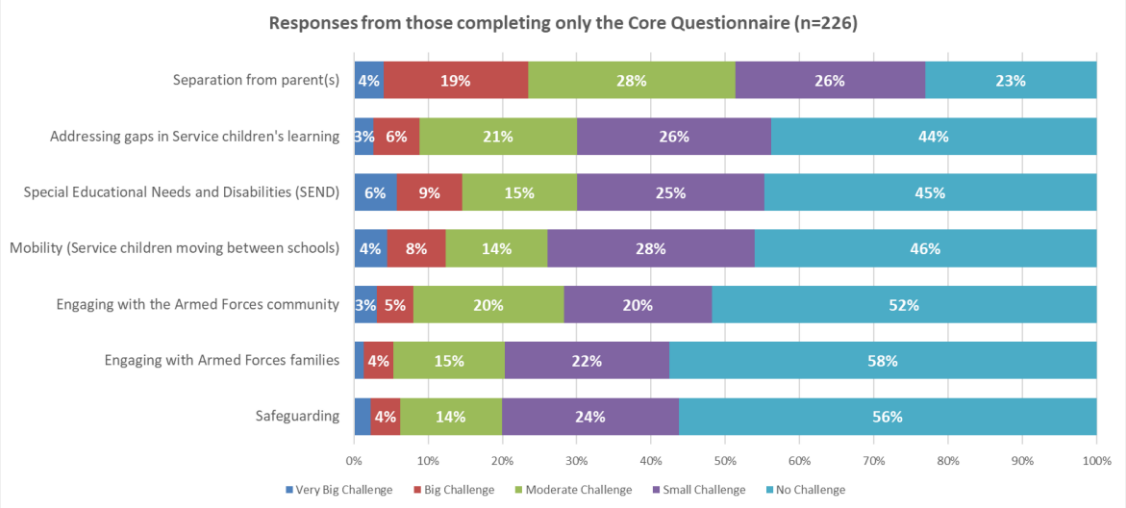
The reported percentages are rounded to the nearest integer, so may not sum to 100. Percentage values equal to or less than 2% are not reported.

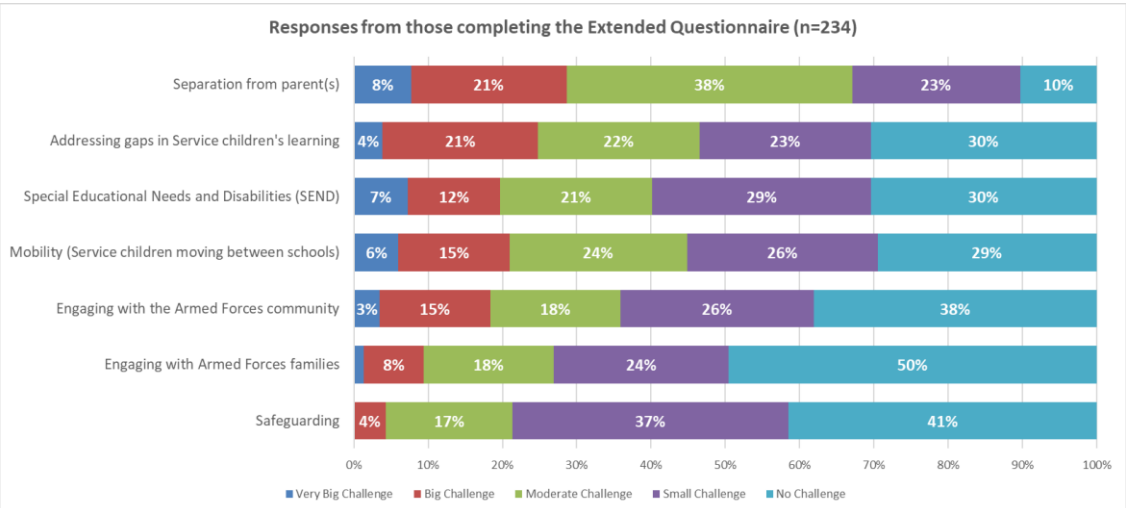
A.1 Overall Results

The overall responses from the full set of 460 respondents who completed the quantitative questions were as follows:

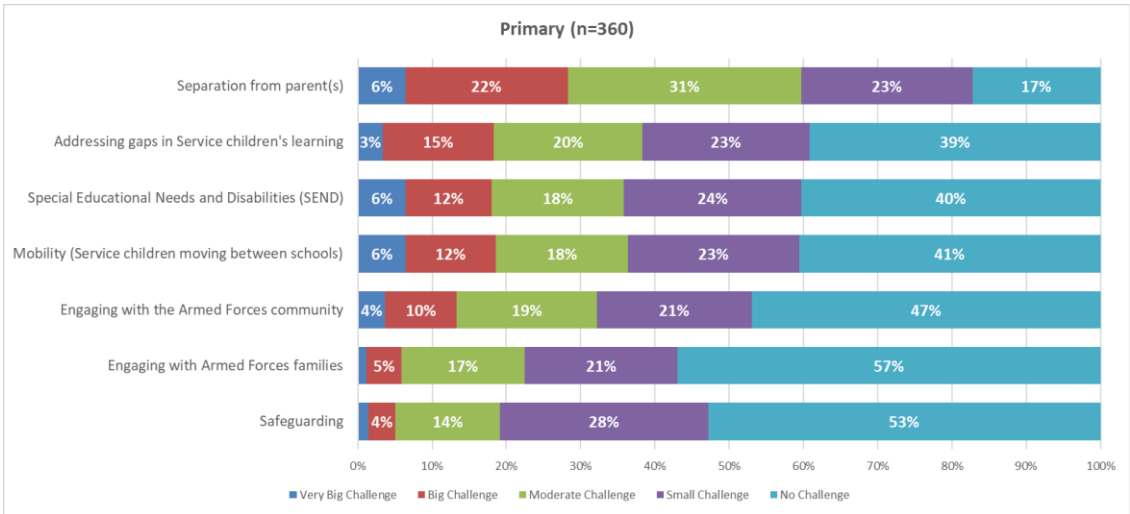


The full data set was split into those who completed each version of the questionnaire. This shows that respondents completing the extended questionnaire where more likely to identify a greater level of challenge than those completing only the core questions.

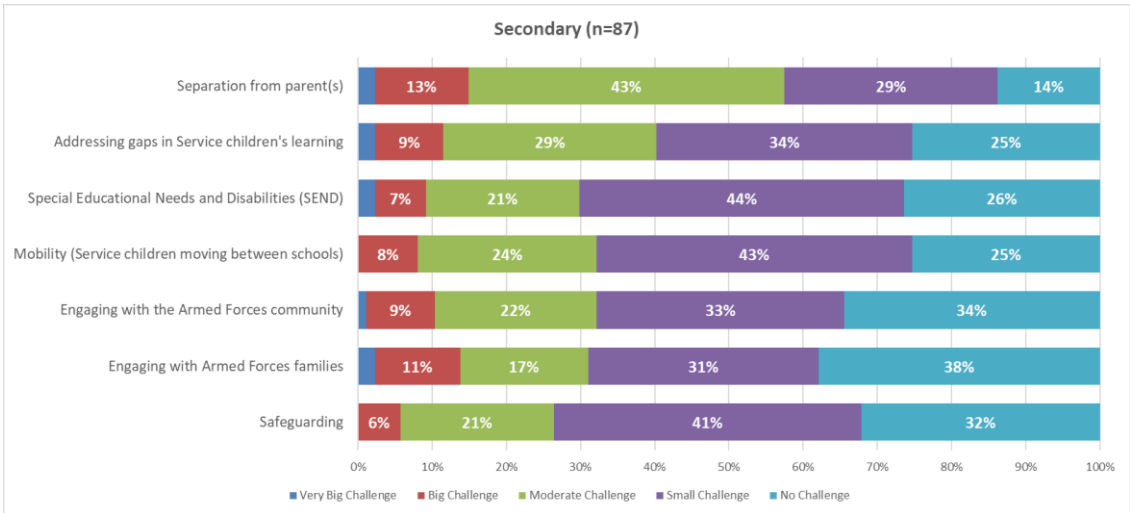




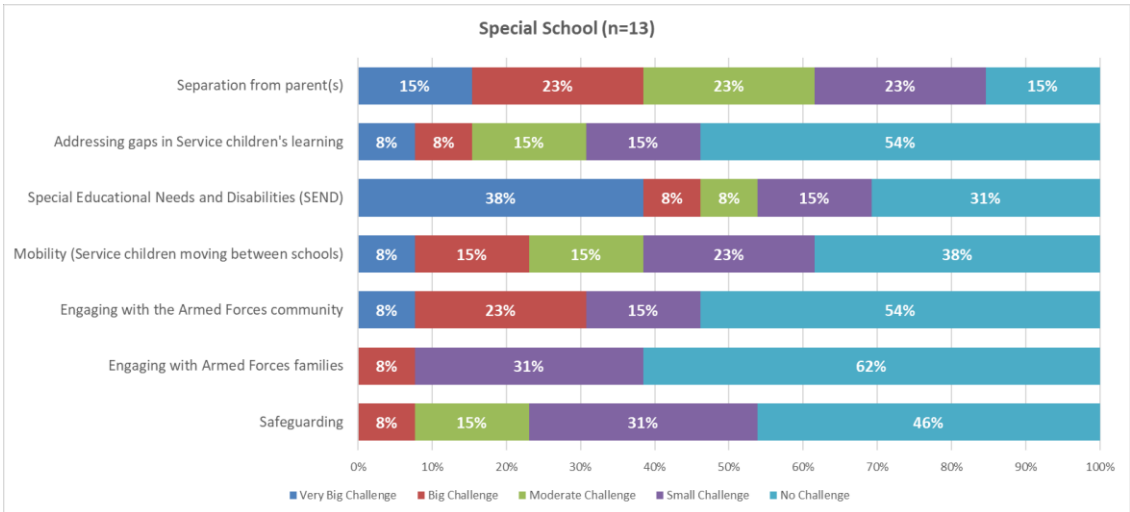
A.2.1 School Type (sub-group responses)



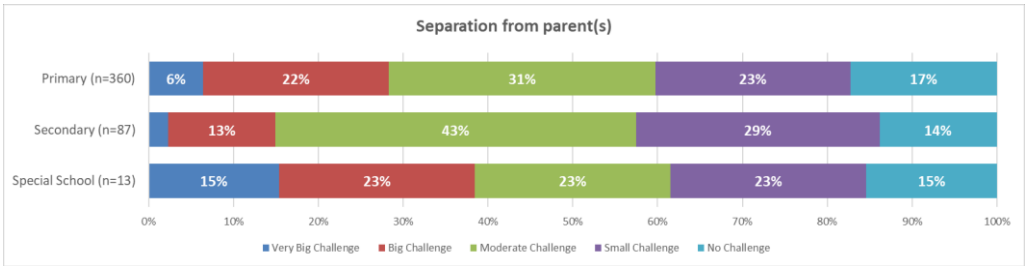
Note: includes 'nursery', 'infant', 'first', 'junior' and 'middle deemed primary' schools

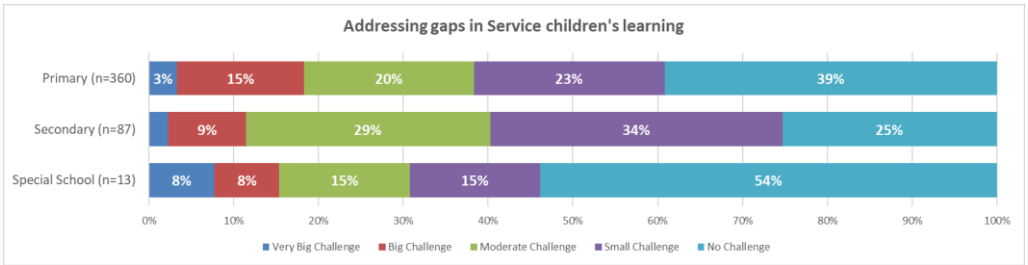


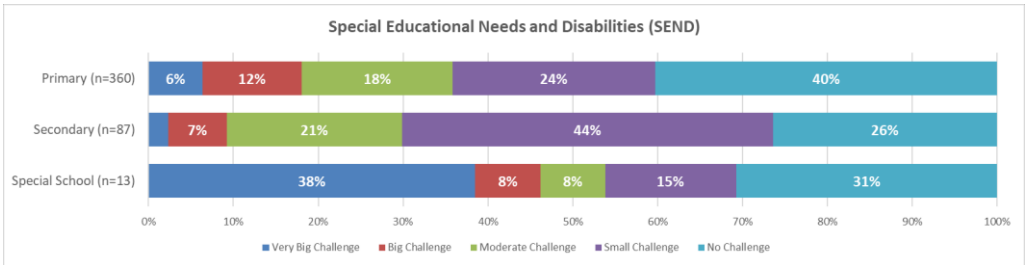
Note: includes 'middle deemed secondary', 'high' and 'all-through (Yr5/6+)' schools

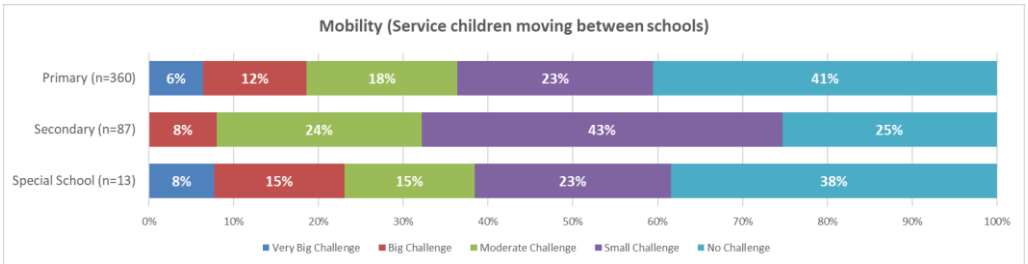


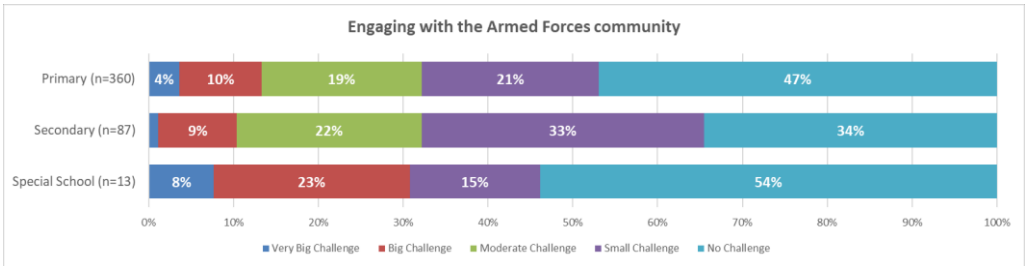
A.2.2 School Type (comparison between sub-groups)

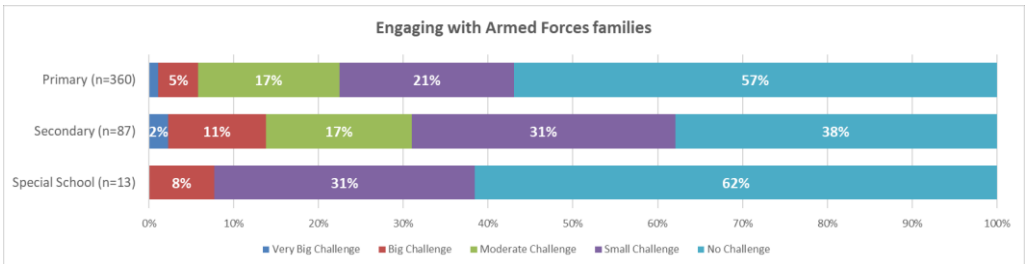


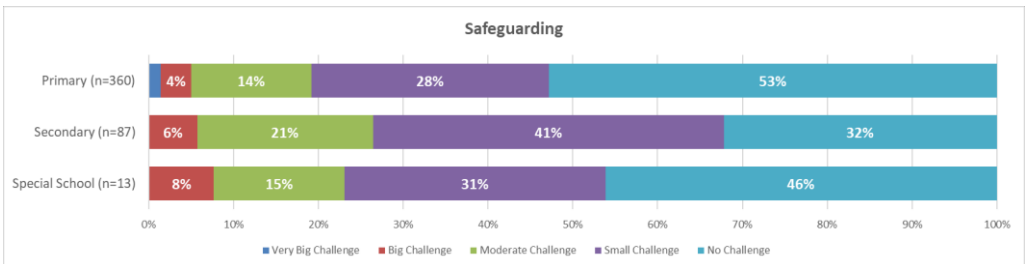






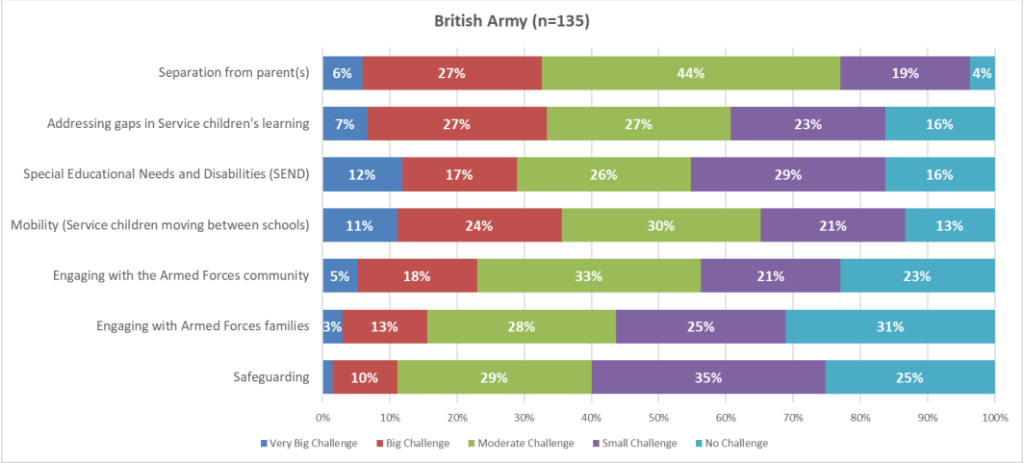


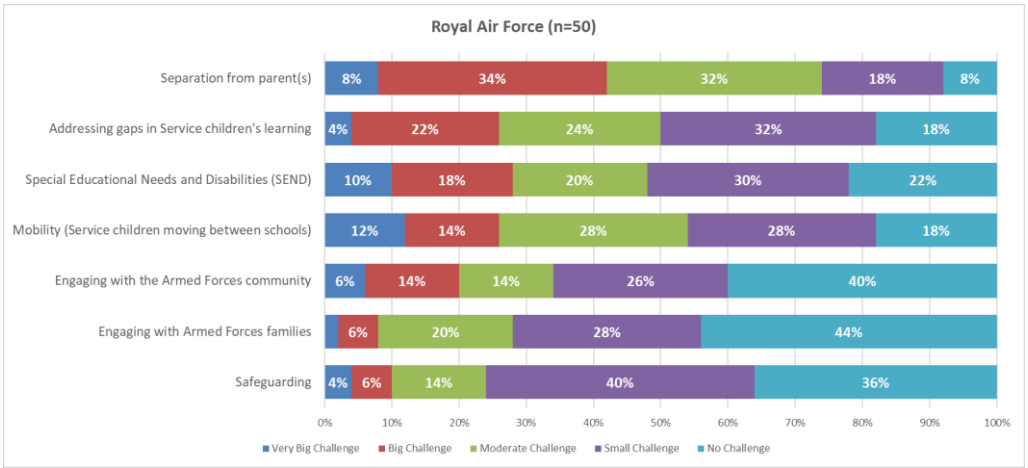


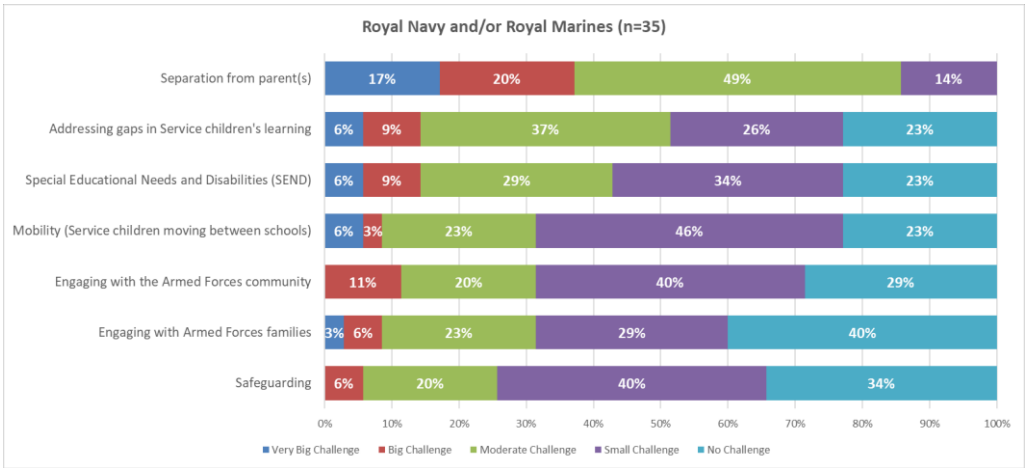


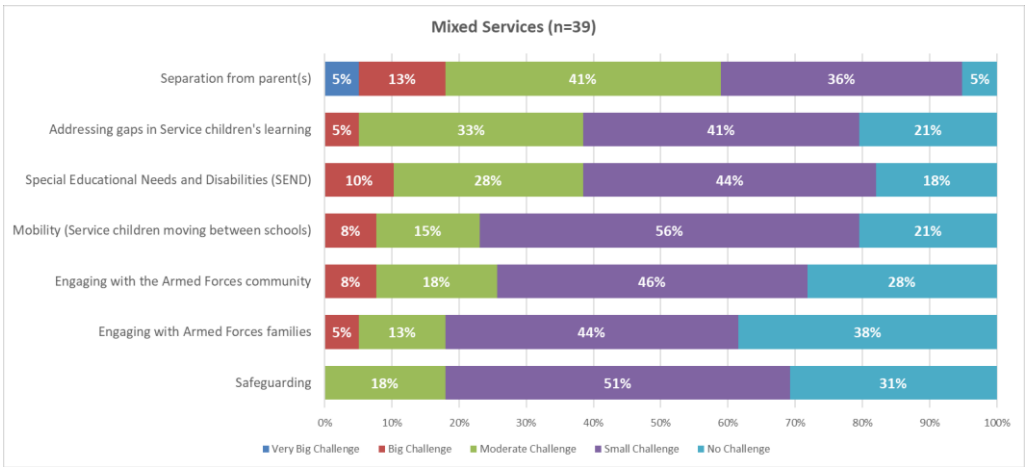
A.3.1 Main Service of Service Children Cohort (sub-group responses)

Note: Responses from schools with very low numbers of Service children (n=201) are not included in this section

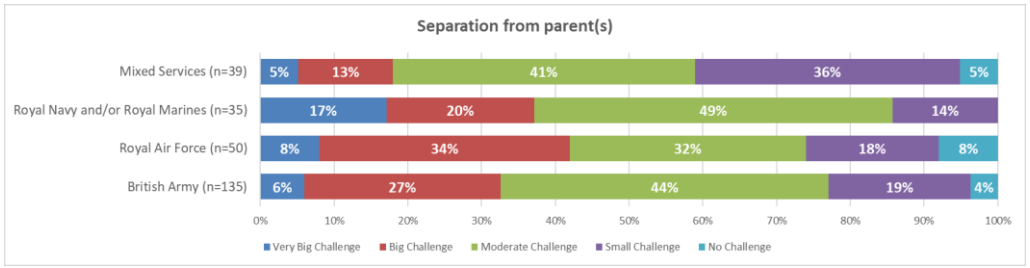


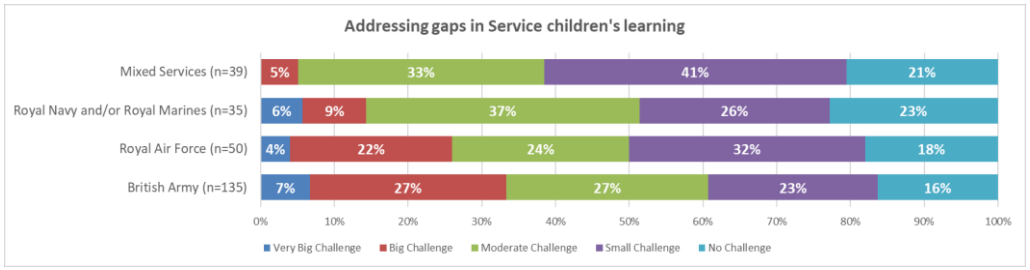


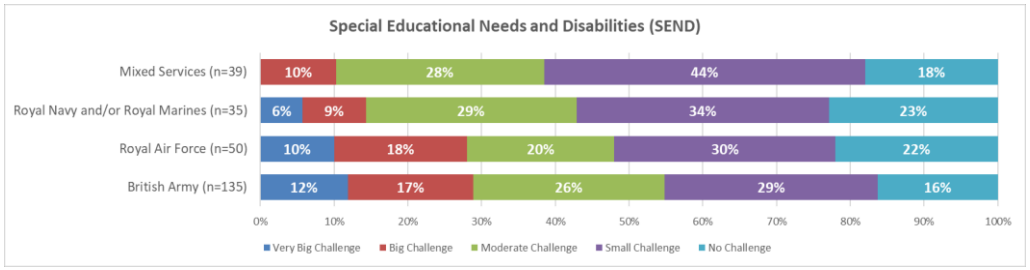


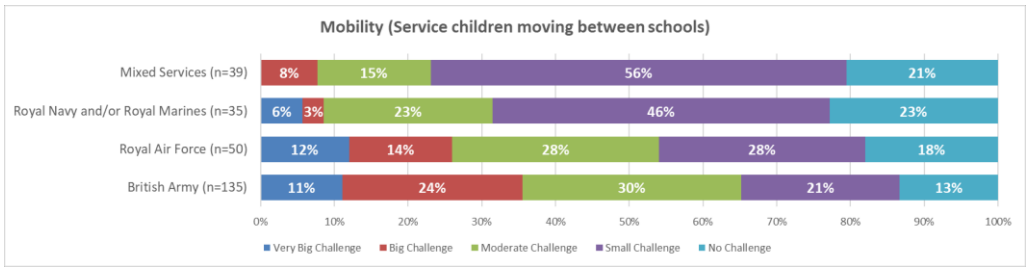


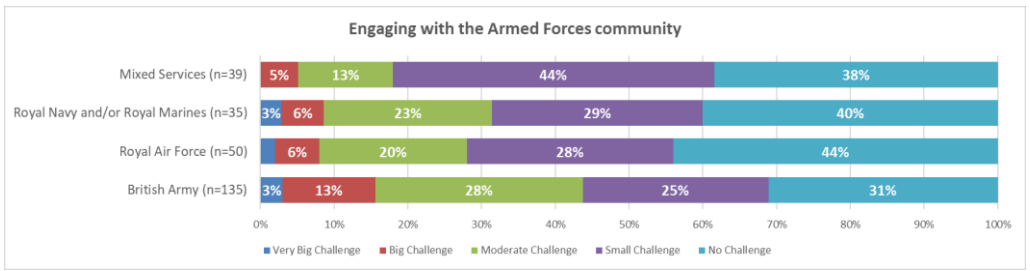
A.3.2 Main Service of Service Children Cohort (comparison between sub-groups)

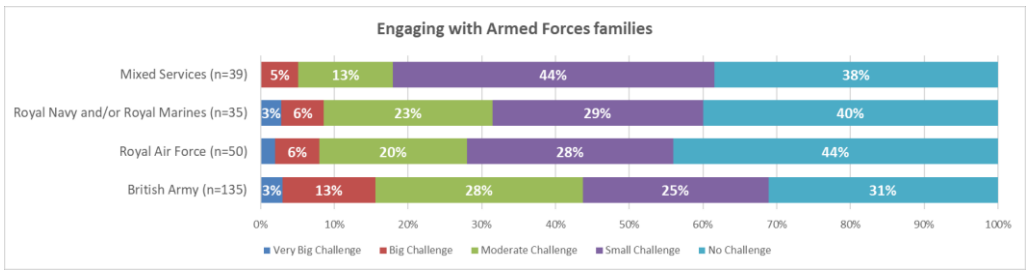


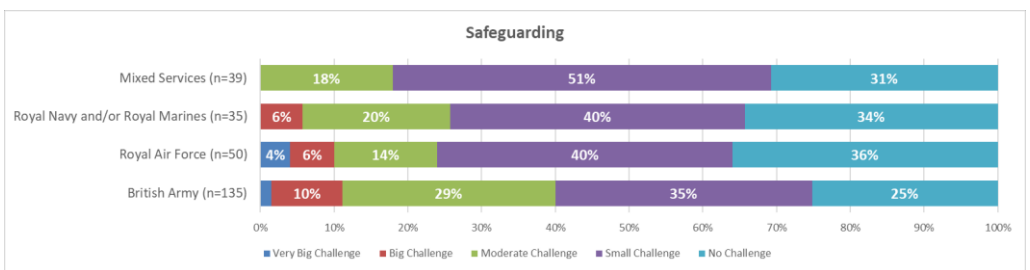




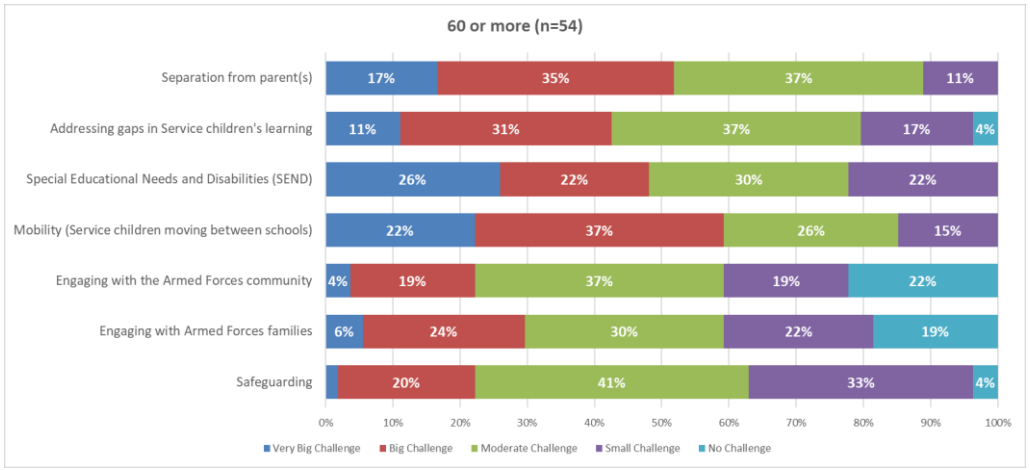


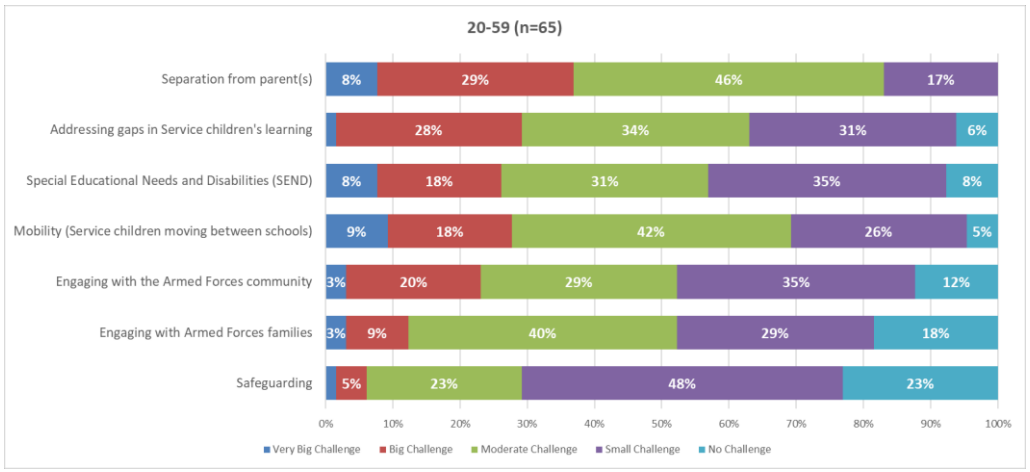


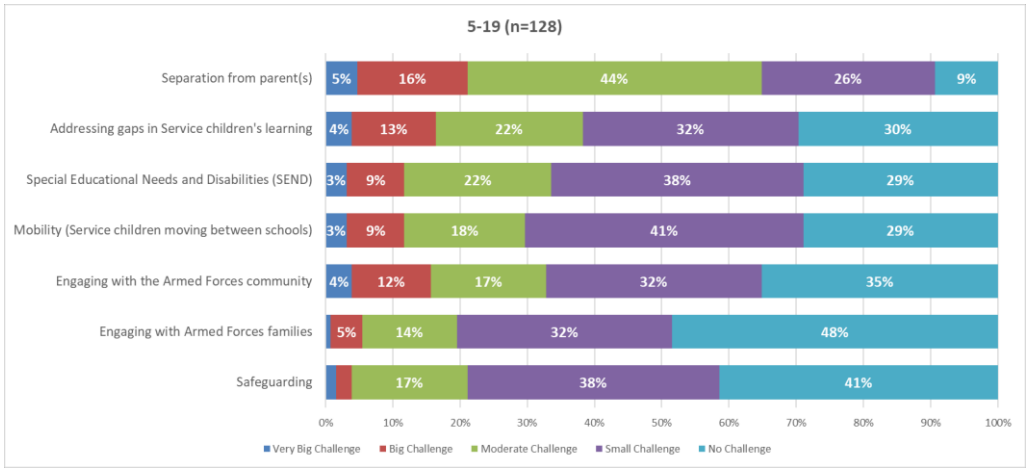


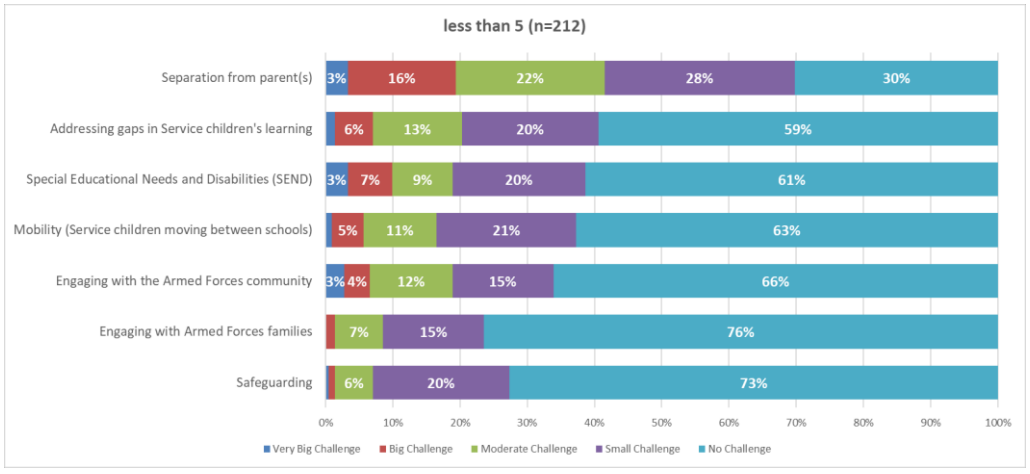


A.4.1 Number of Service Children on Roll (sub-group responses)

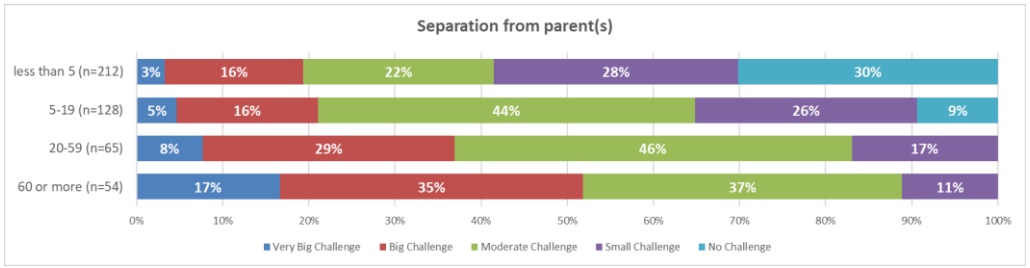


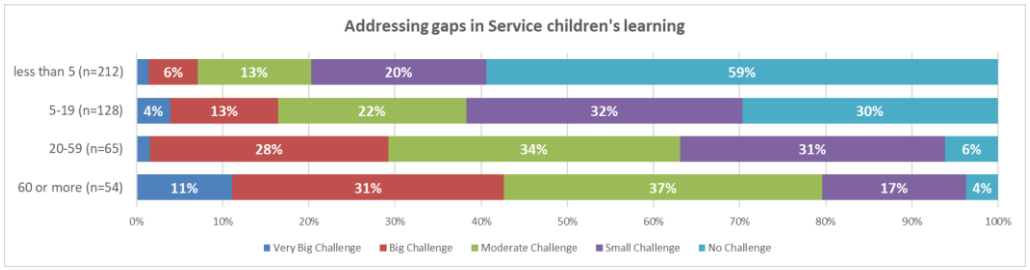


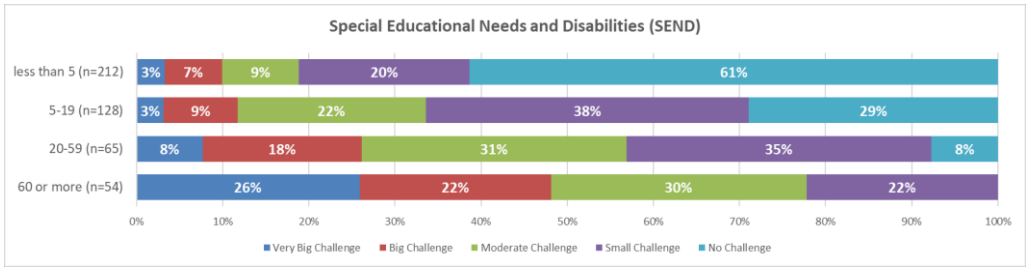


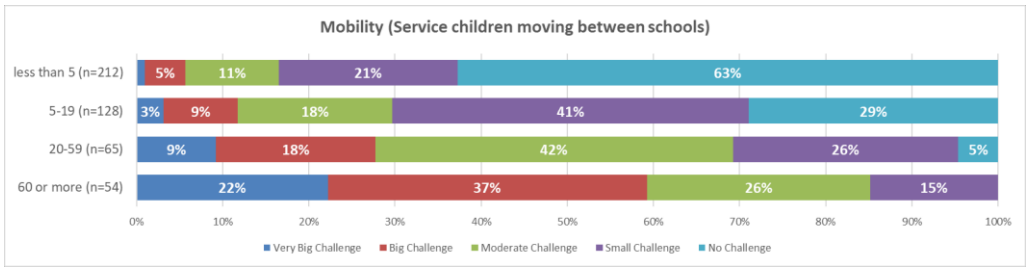


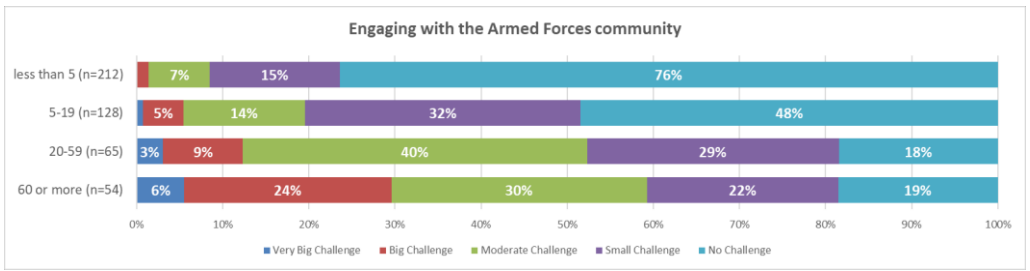
A.4.2 Number of Service Children on Roll (comparison between sub-groups)

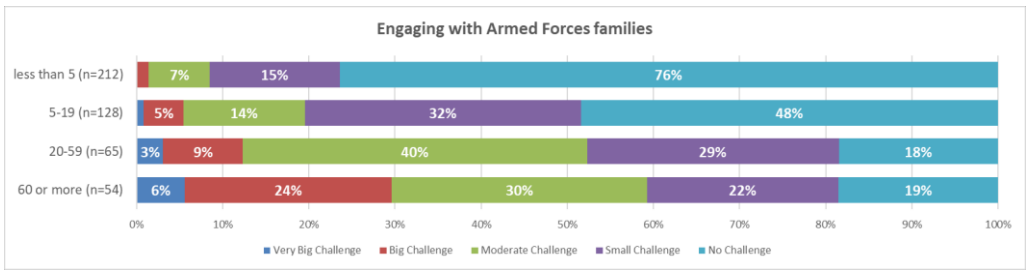


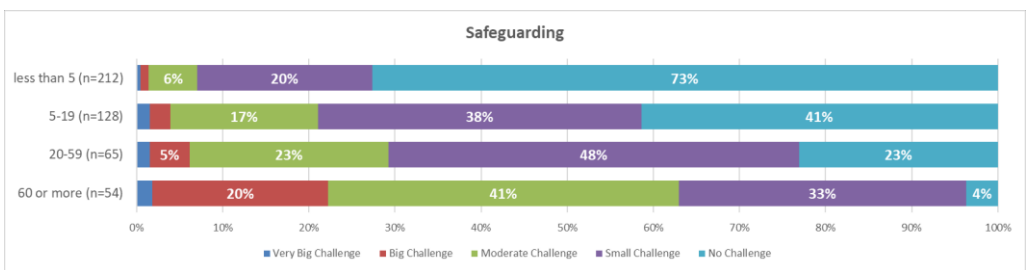




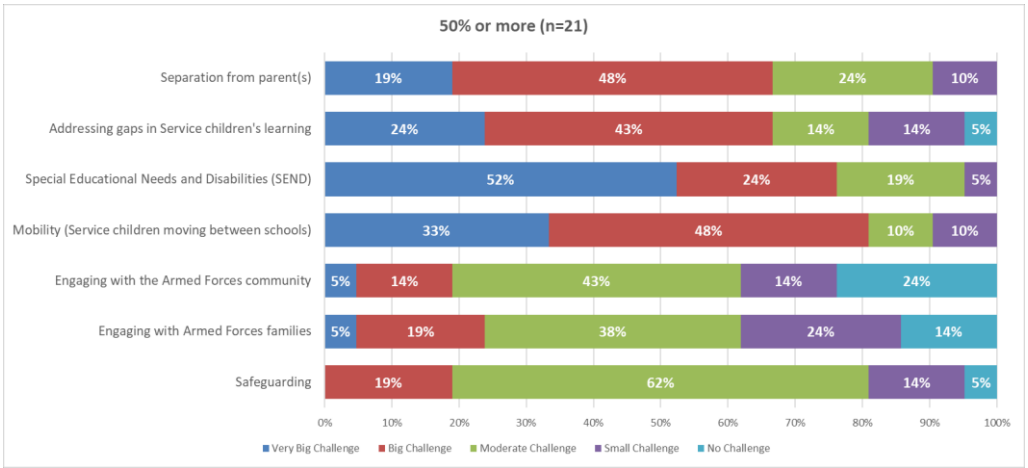


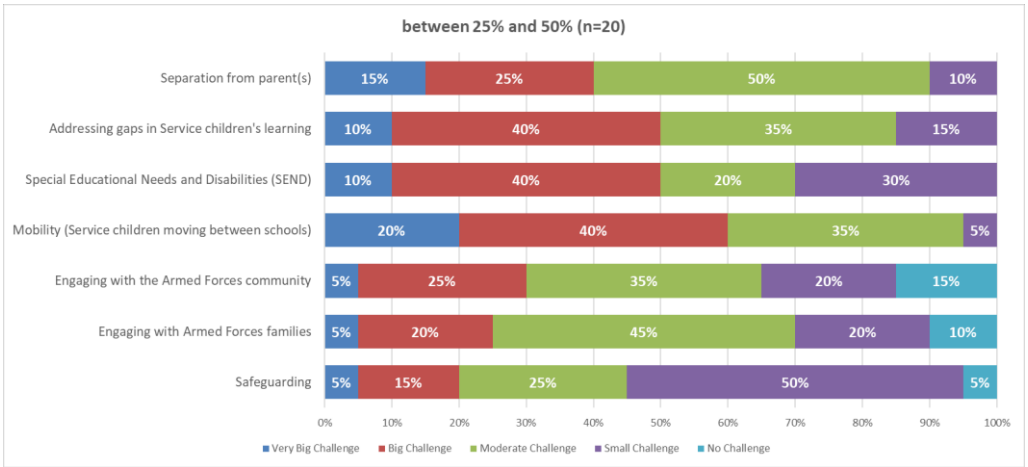


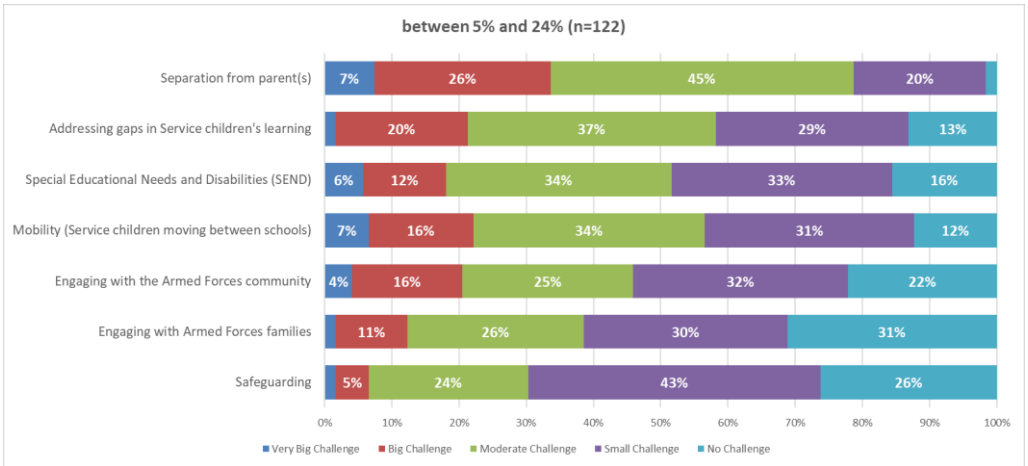


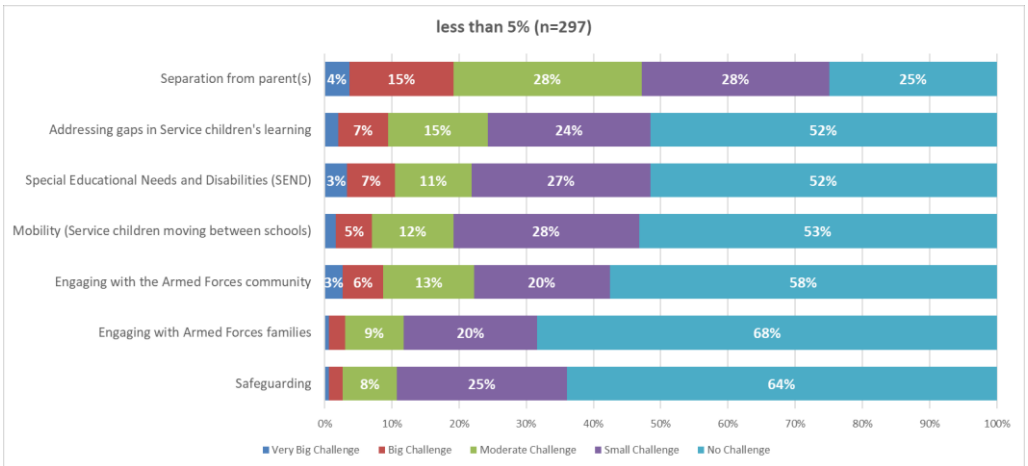


A.5.1 Service Children as Percentage of Roll (sub-group responses)

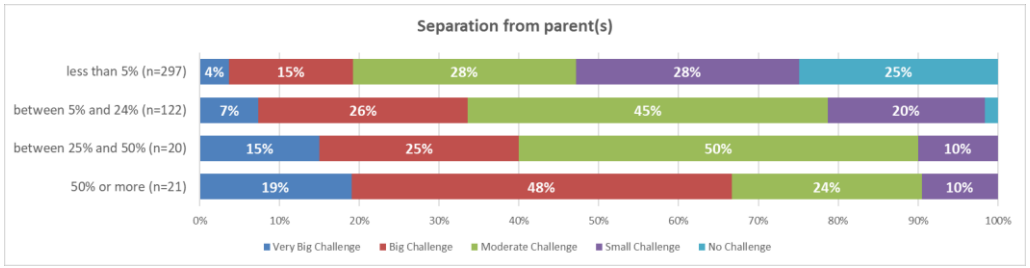


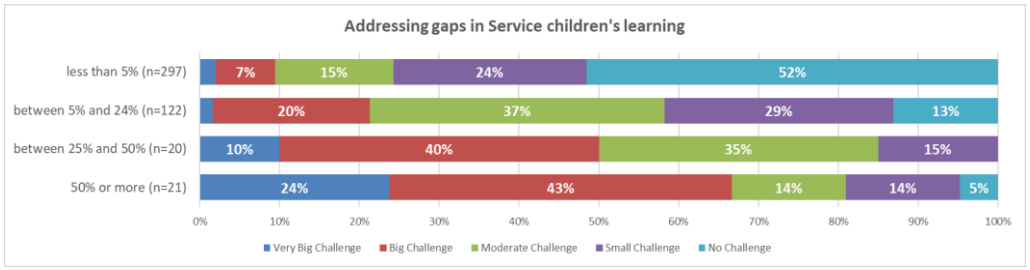


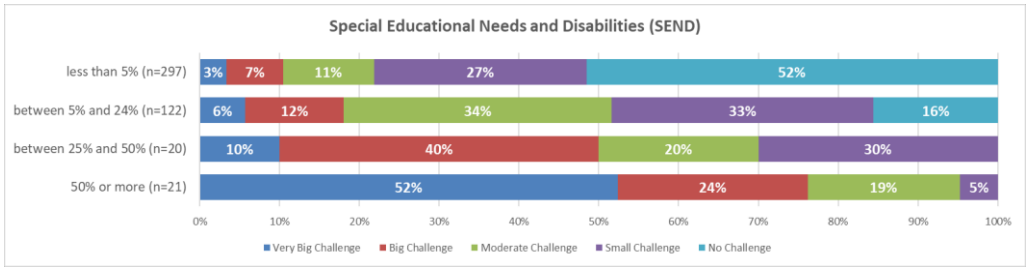


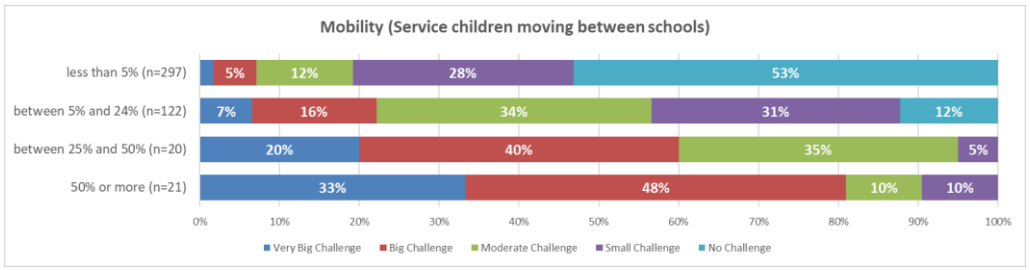


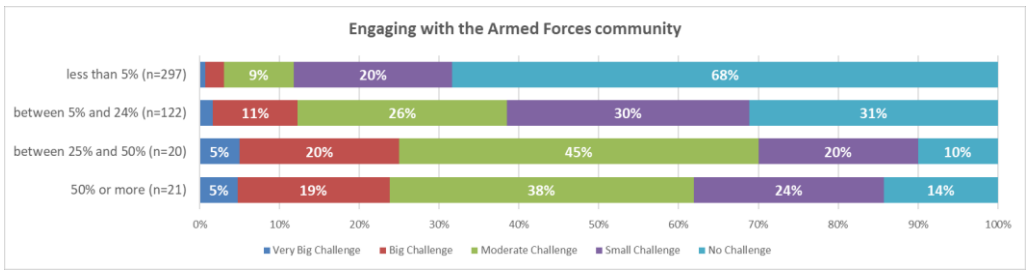
A.5.2 Service Children as Percentage of Roll (comparison of sub-groups)

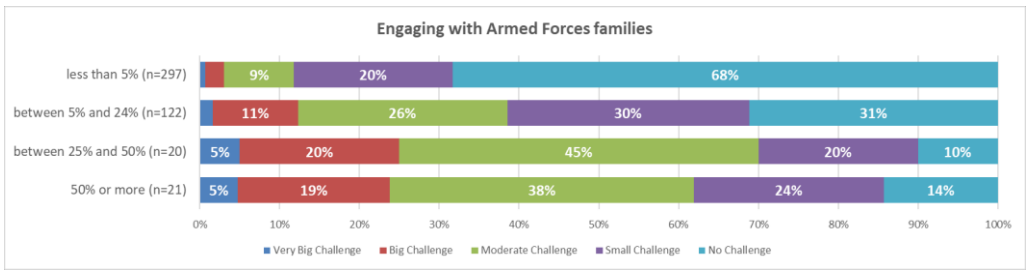


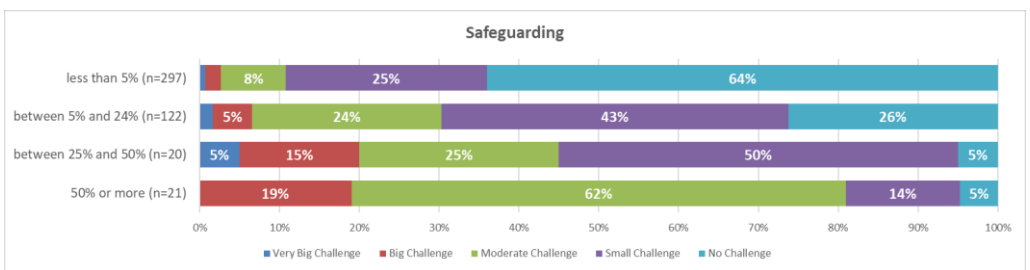






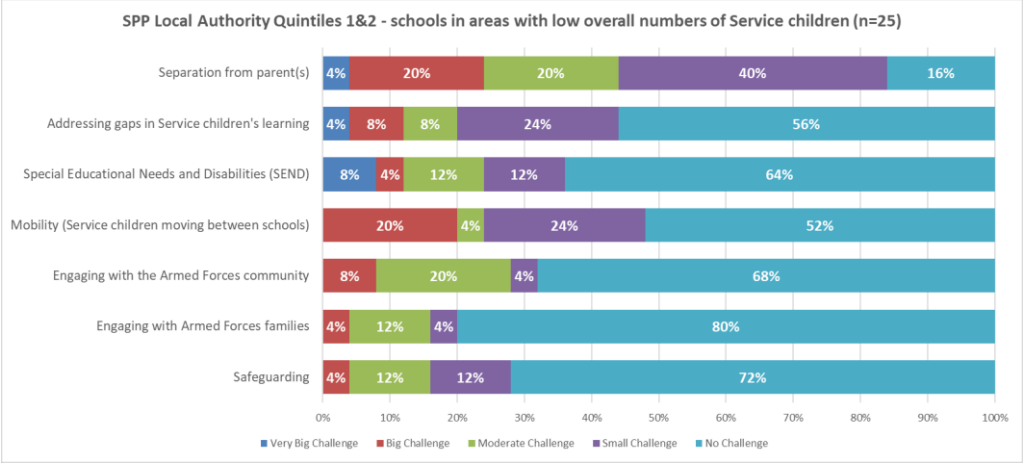


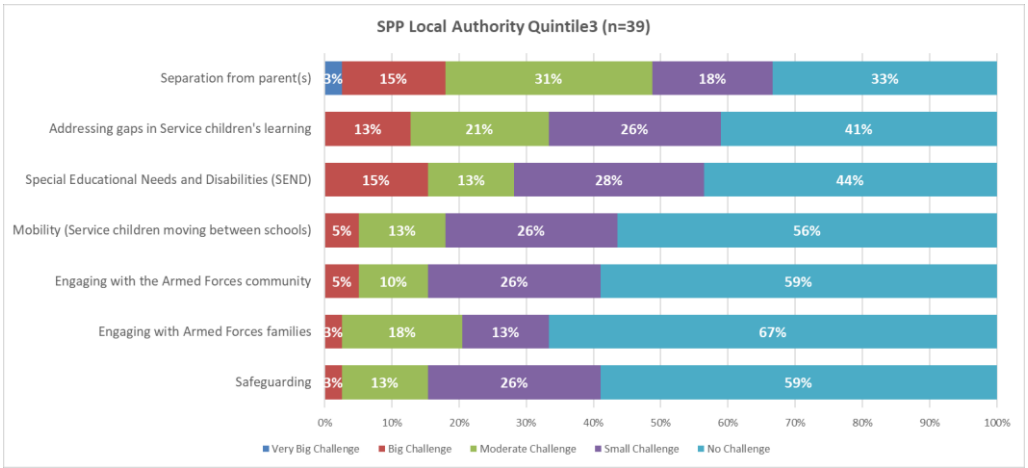


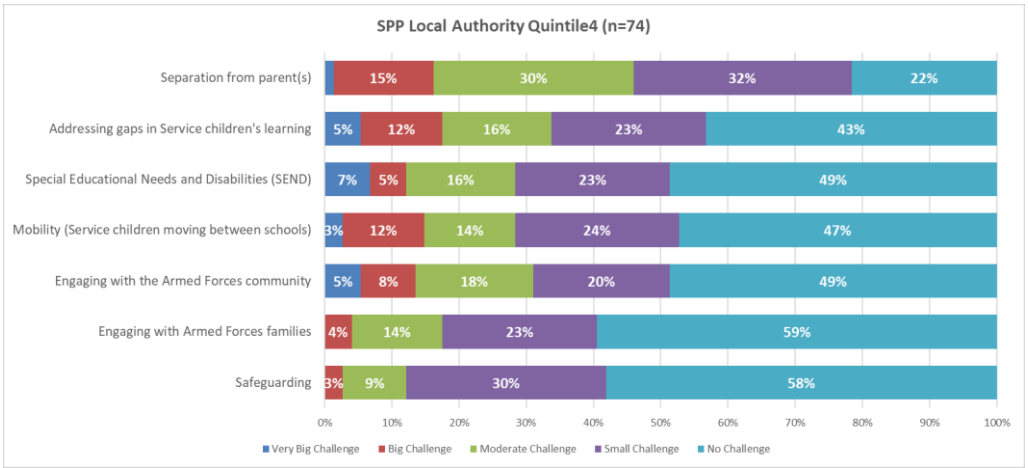


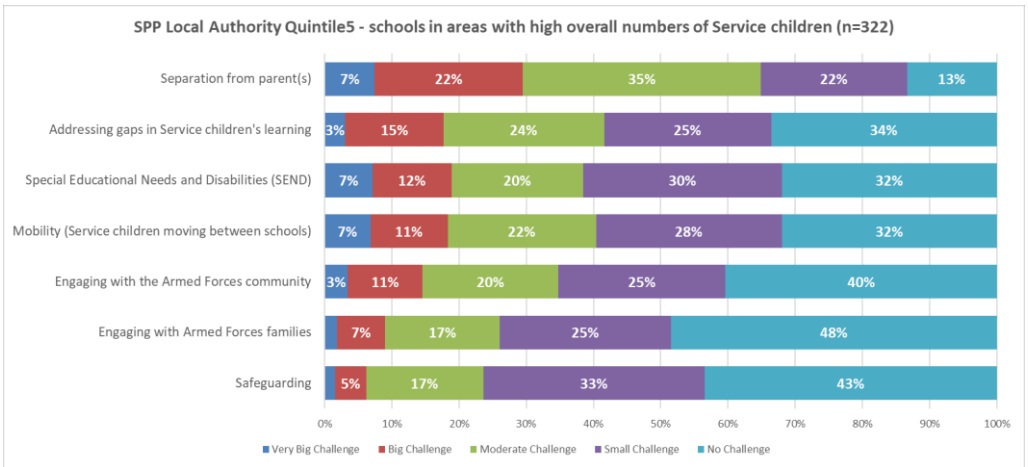
A.6.1 Local Authority Quintile for Service Pupil Premium (sub-group responses)

Note: Responses from schools in Quintile 1 (n=8) and Quintile 2 (n=17) have been combined.

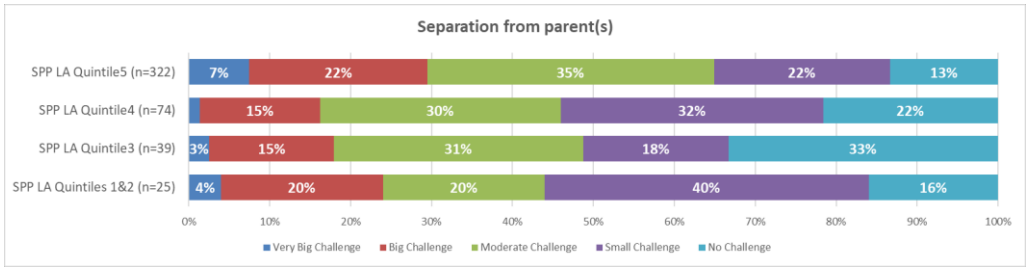


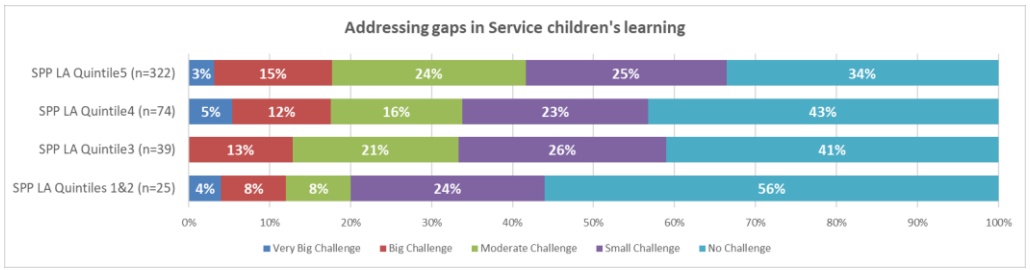


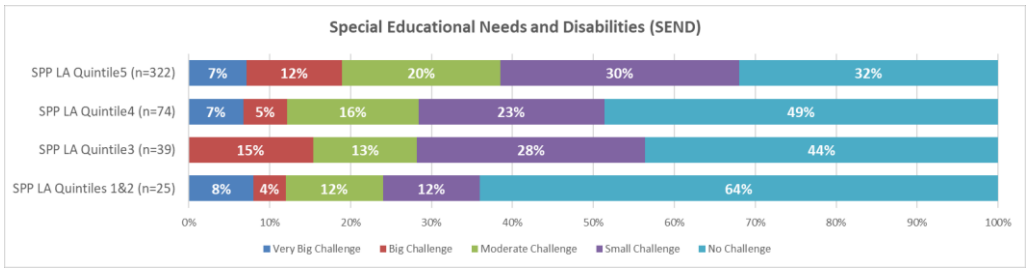


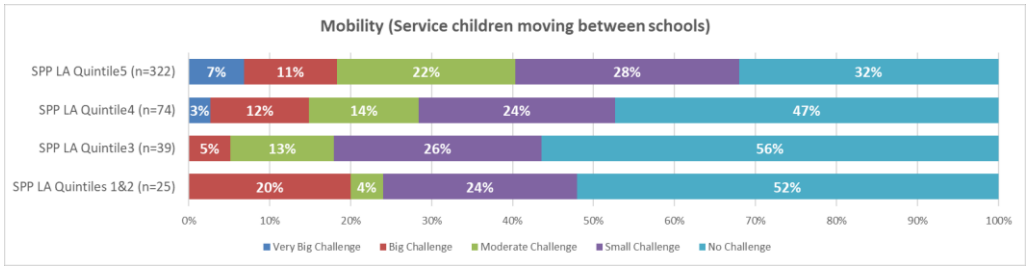


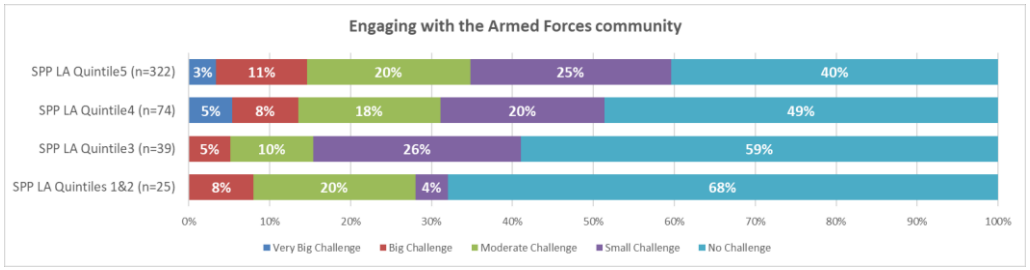
A.6.2 Local Authority Quintile for SPP (comparison between sub-groups)

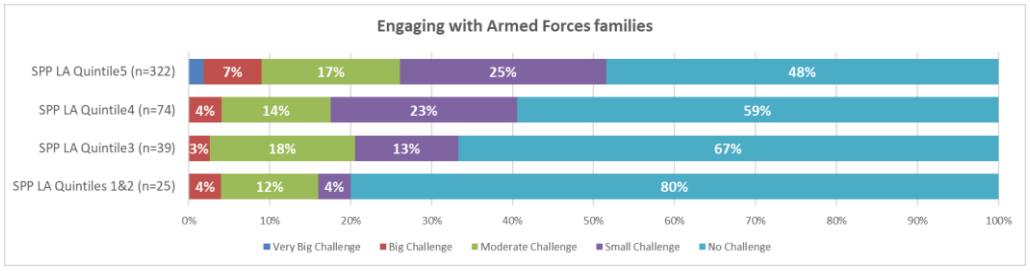


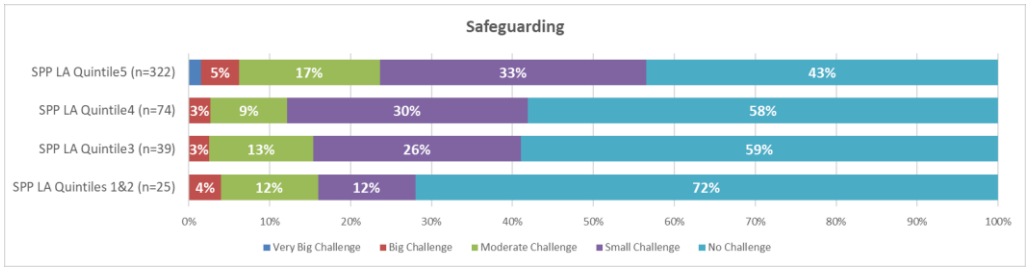




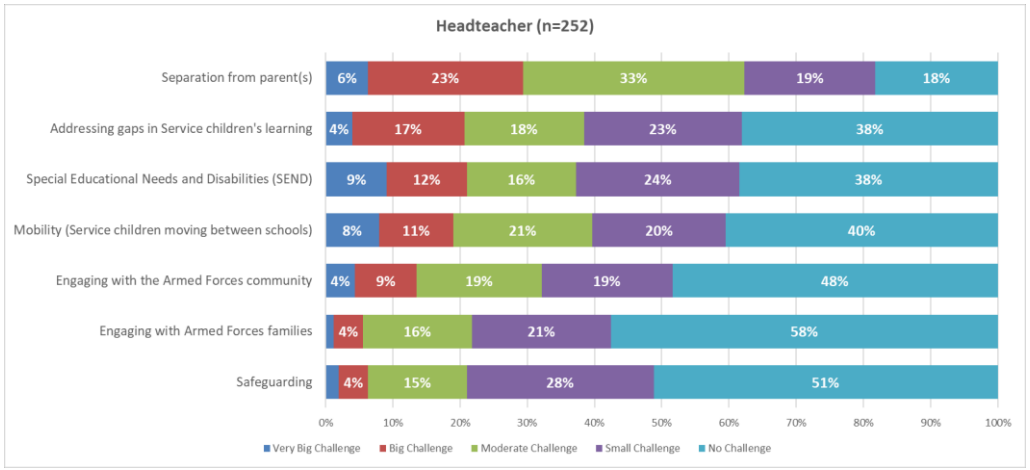


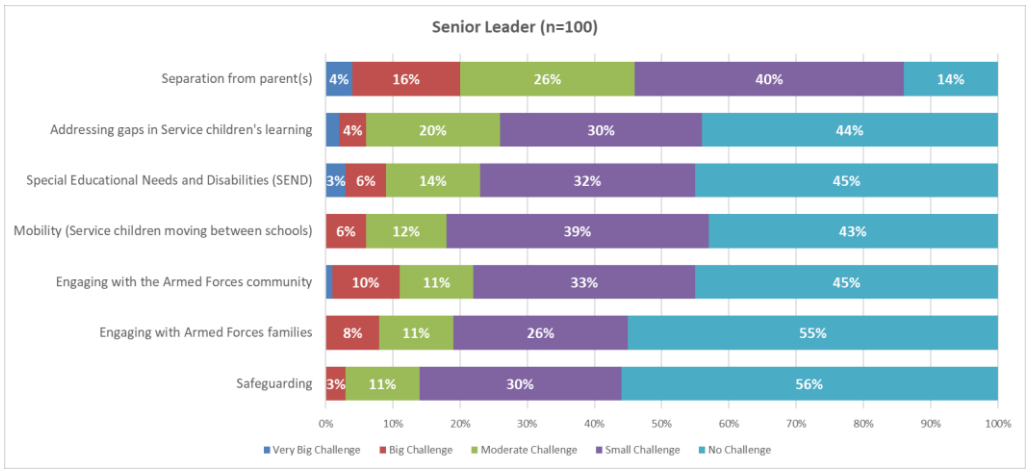


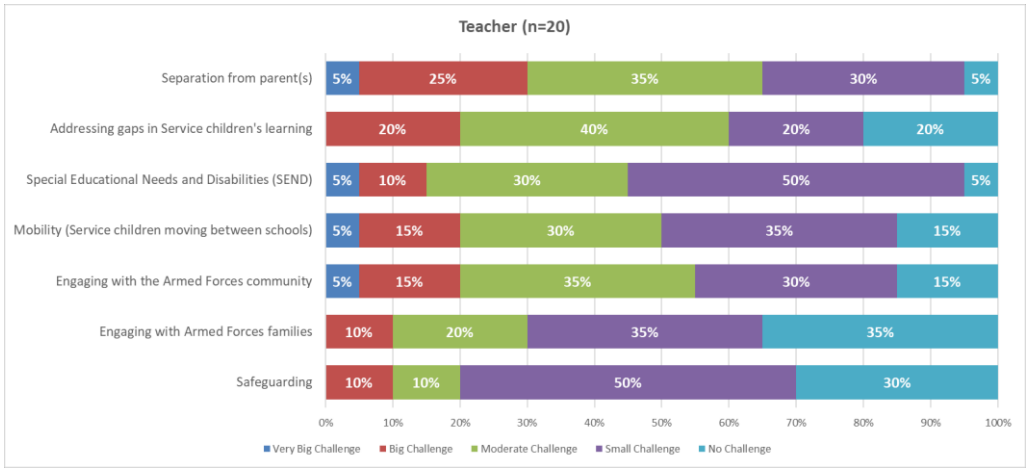


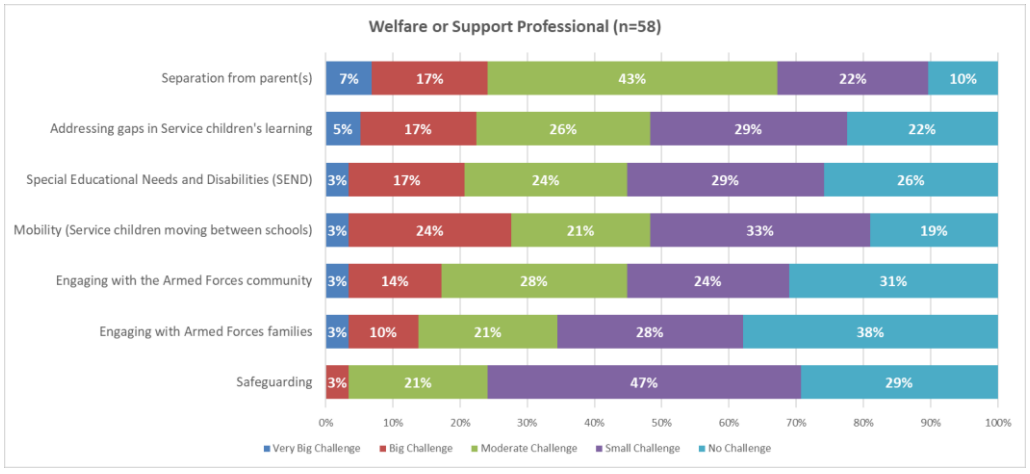


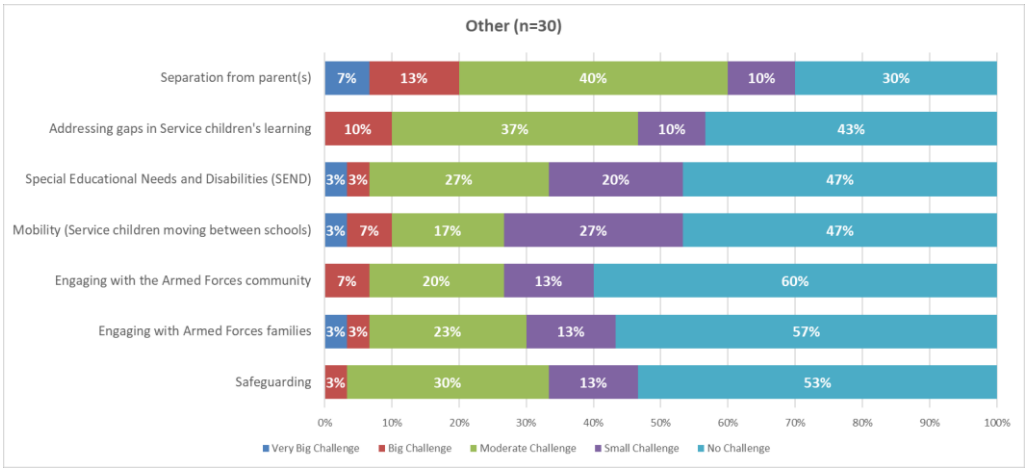
A.7.1 Responses by Role of Respondent (sub-group responses)



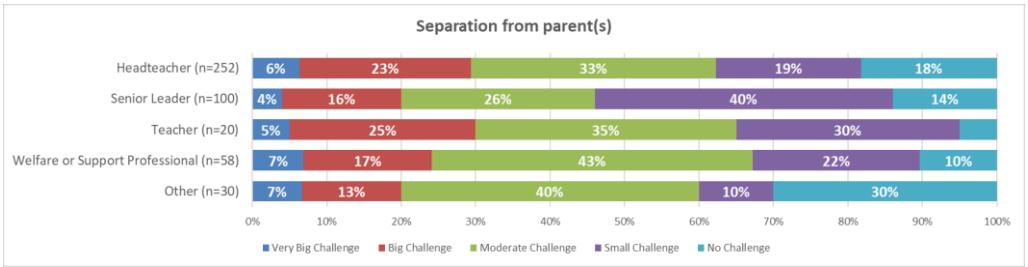


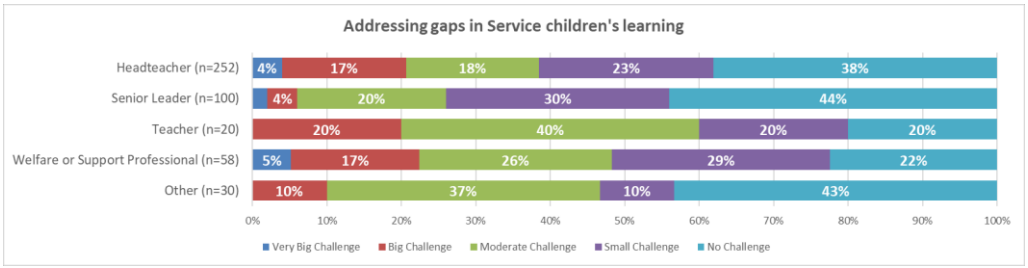


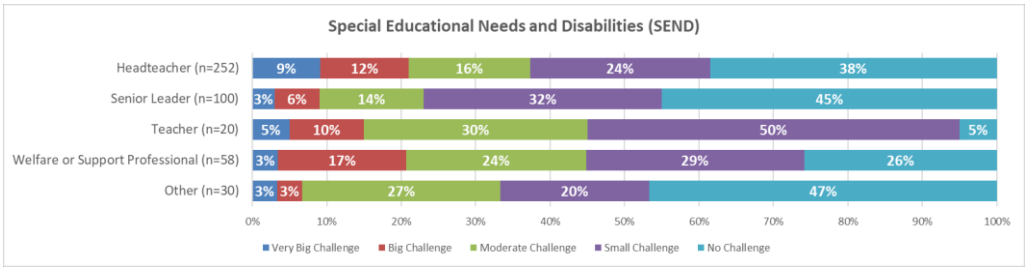


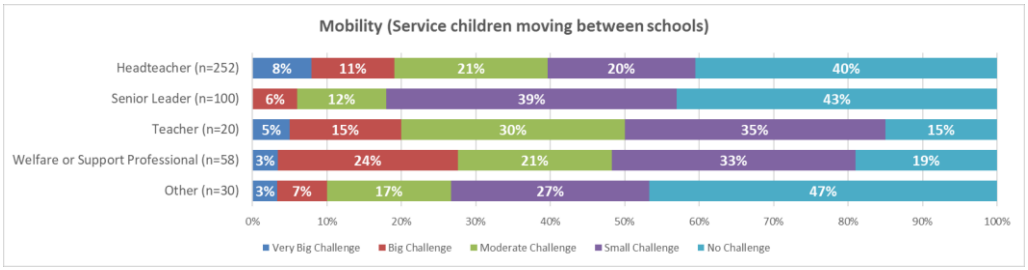


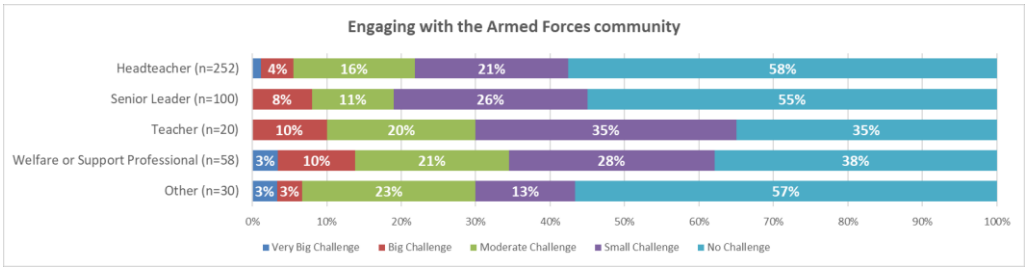
A.7.2 Responses by Role of Respondent (comparison between subgroups)

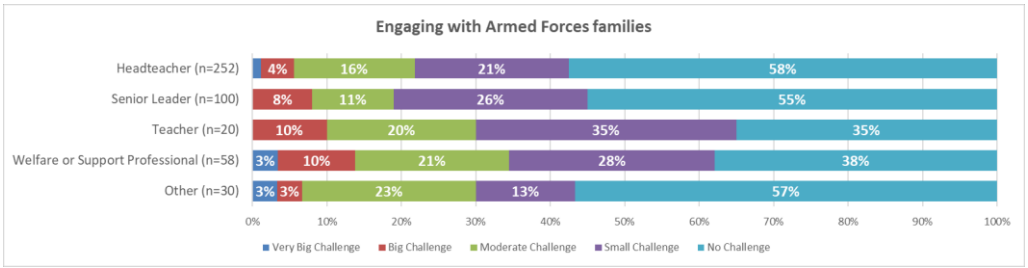


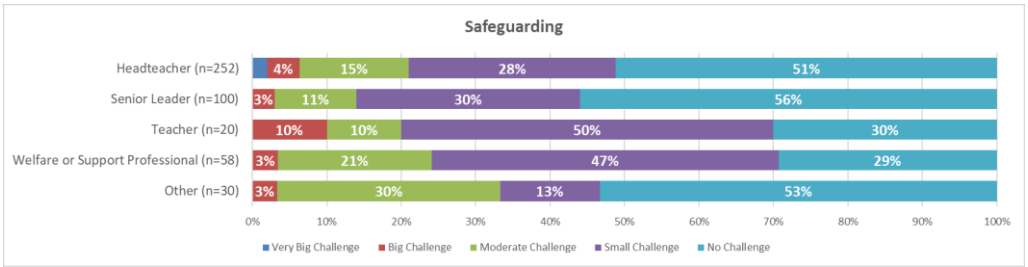









Engaging with Armed Forces families
Headteacher (n=252)
Senior Leader (n=100)
Teacher (n=20)
Welfare or Support Professional (n=58)
Other (n=30)
4%
16%
21%
58%
8%
11%
26%
55%
10%
20%
35%
35%
3%
10%
21%
28%
38%
3%
3%
23%
13%
57%
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Very Big Challenge
Big Challenge
Moderate Challenge
Small Challenge
No Challenge

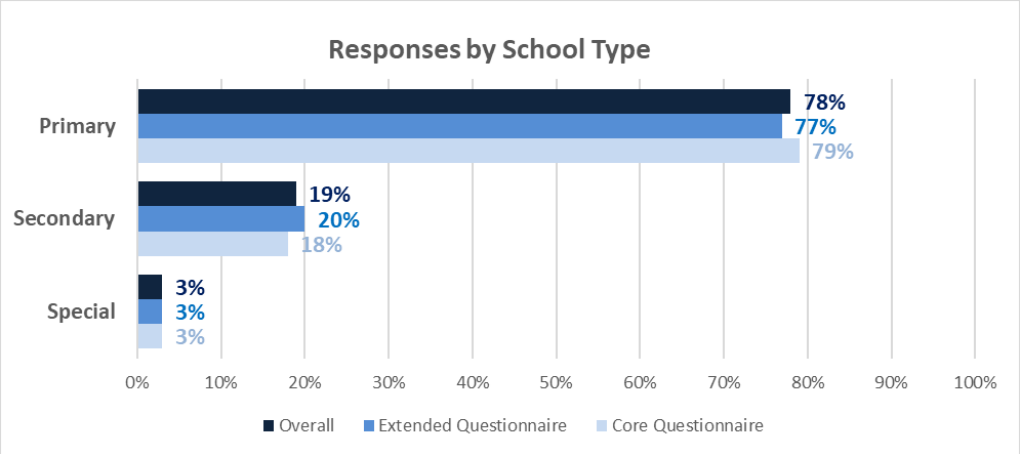

Safeguarding
Headteacher (n=252)
Senior Leader (n=100)
Teacher (n=20)
Welfare or Support Professional (n=58)
Other (n=30)
4%
15%
28%
51%
3%
11%
30%
56%
10%
10%
50%
30%
3%
21%
47%
29%
3%
30%
13%
53%
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Very Big Challenge
Big Challenge
Moderate Challenge
Small Challenge
No Challenge

Appendix B – Profile of Questionnaire Respondents

The charts in this appendix show the proportion of responses received from each subgroup of respondents. The breakdown for each variable shows:

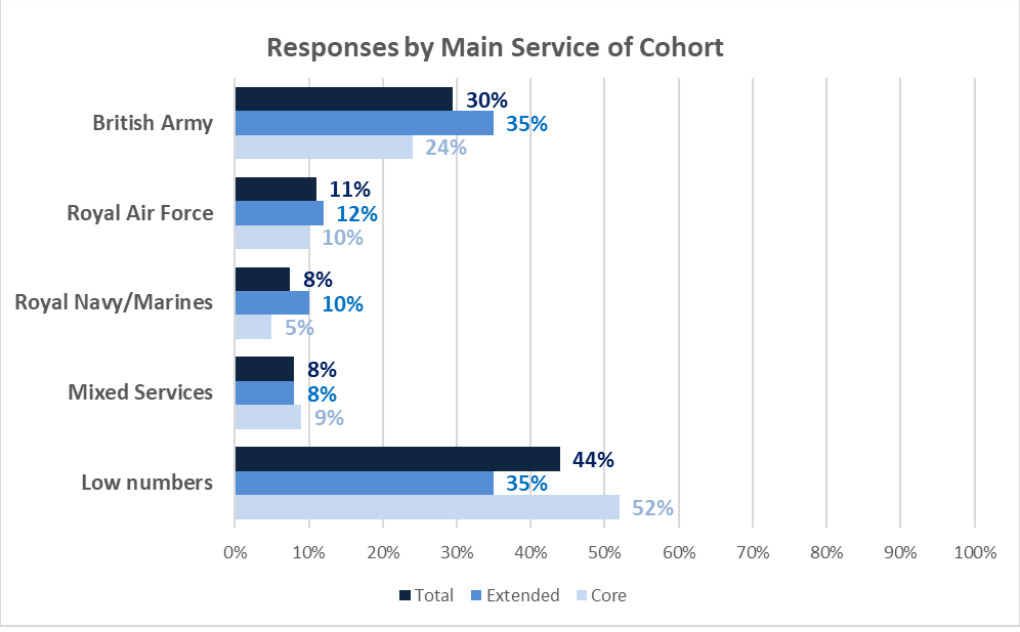
- The overall proportion of respondents from each subgroup. These are the respondents who completed the questions presented in Appendix A;
- The proportion of respondents from each subgroup who completed the extended questionnaire. These are the respondents who completed the free-response questions on which the questionnaire elements of the majority of the qualitative analysis is based;
- The proportion of respondents from each subgroup who completed only the core questionnaire. These illustrate variations in the progression from the core questionnaire to the extended questionnaire shown by different subgroups.

B.1 Responses received by school type

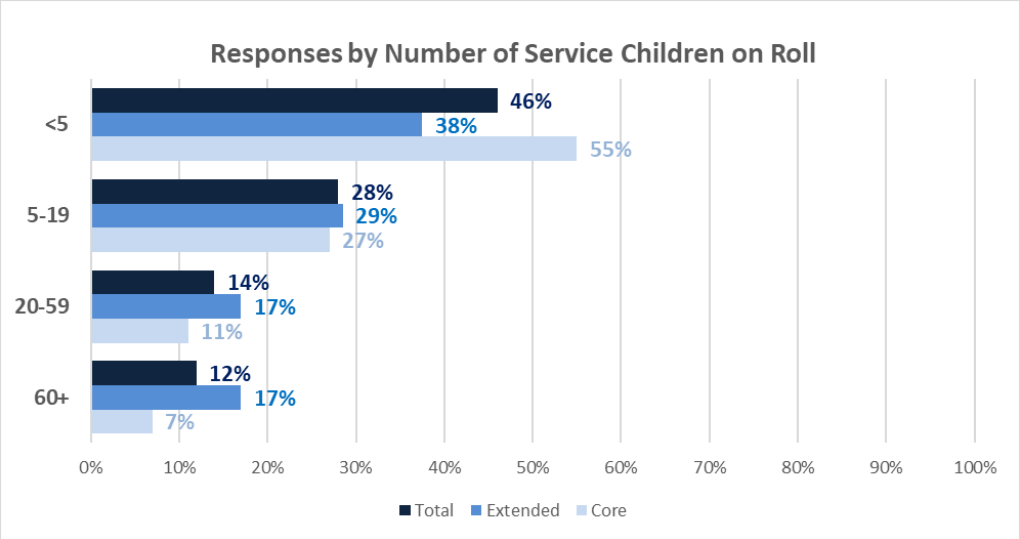


Note: 'Primary' includes 'nursery', 'infant', 'first', 'junior' and 'middle deemed primary' schools. 'Secondary' includes 'middle deemed secondary', 'high' and 'all-through (Yr5/6+)' schools

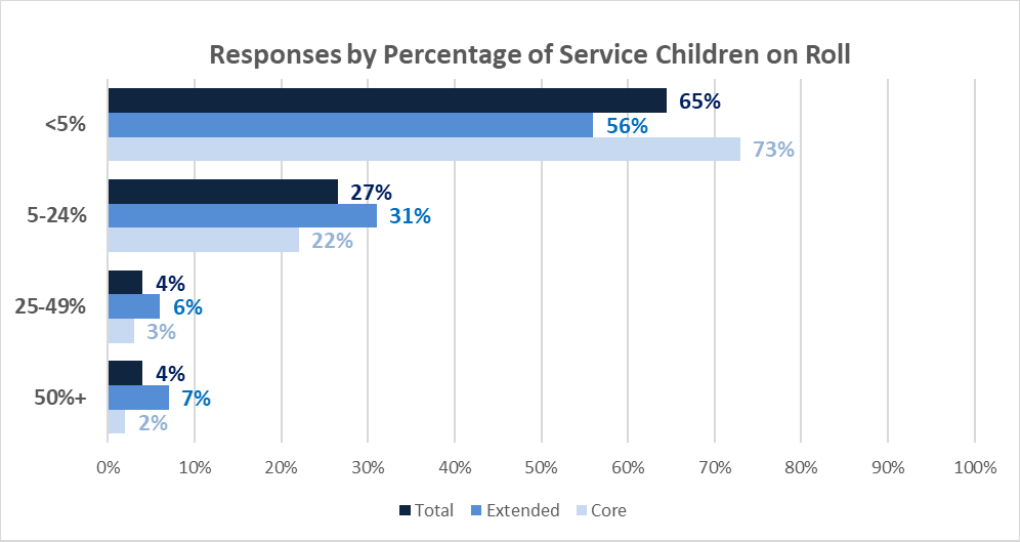
B.2 Responses received by main Service of Service children cohort



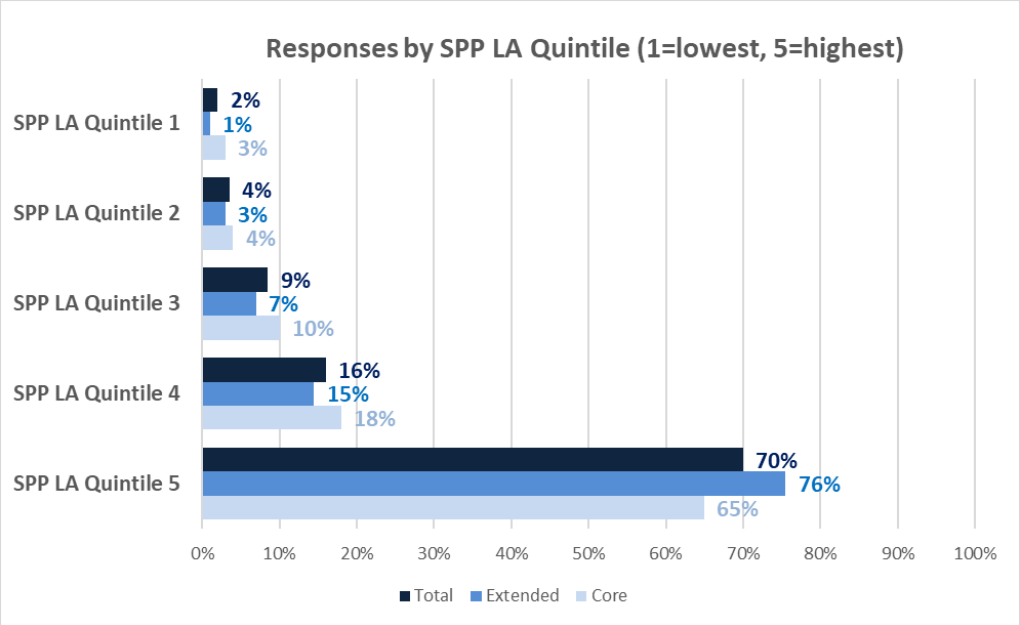
B.3 Responses received by number of Service children on roll



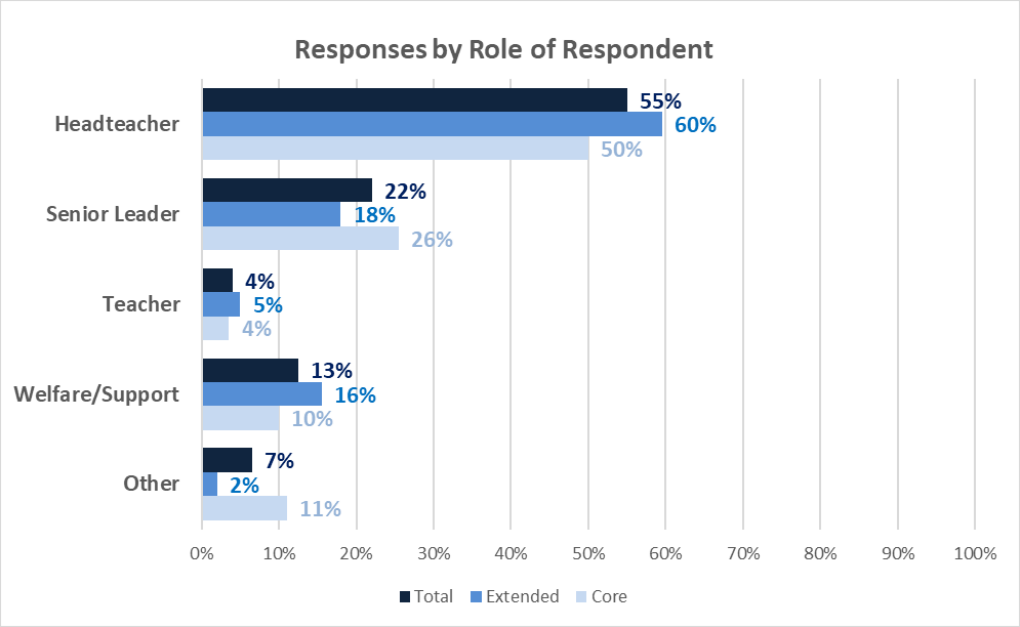
B.4 Responses received by percentage of those on roll who are Service children



B.5 Responses received by Local Authority Quintile for Service Pupil Premium



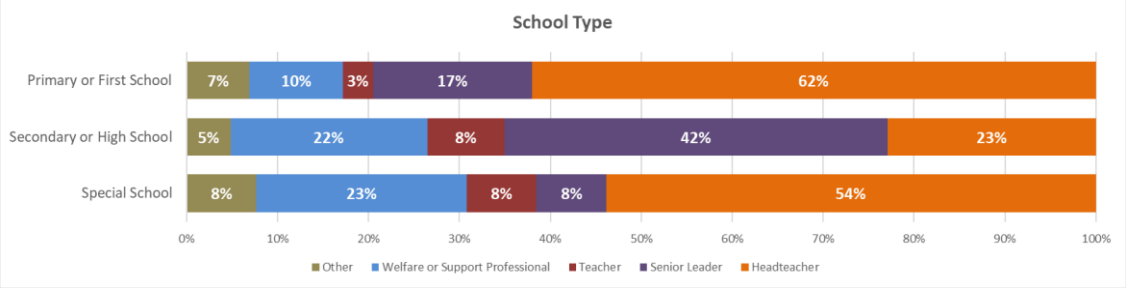
B.6 Responses received by role of respondent



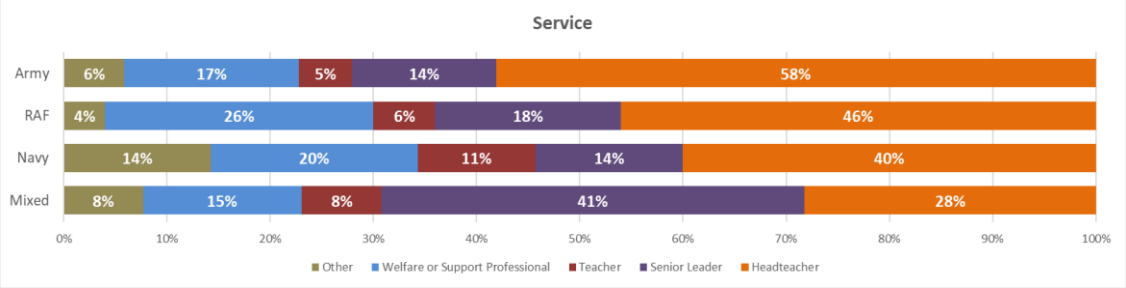
Appendix C – Respondent Type by Subgroup

The charts in this appendix show the type of respondent for each subgroup. These are provided to allow consideration of how responsibilities for addressing the needs of Service children may vary based on the circumstances of each school. It is assumed that each respondent has a lead role within their school for supporting Service children, although this will not be true in every case.

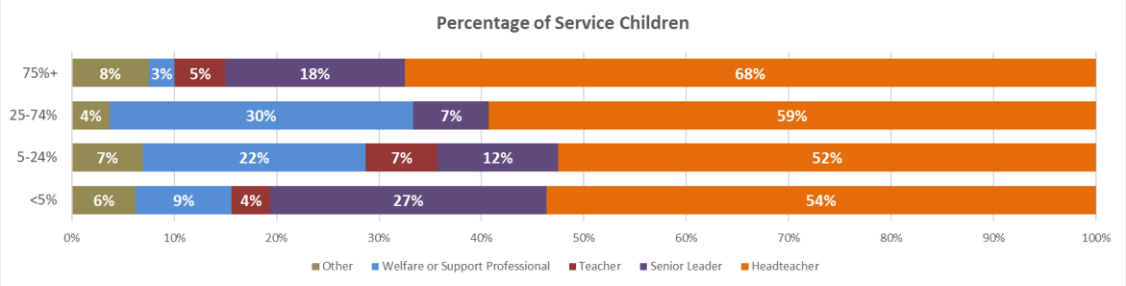
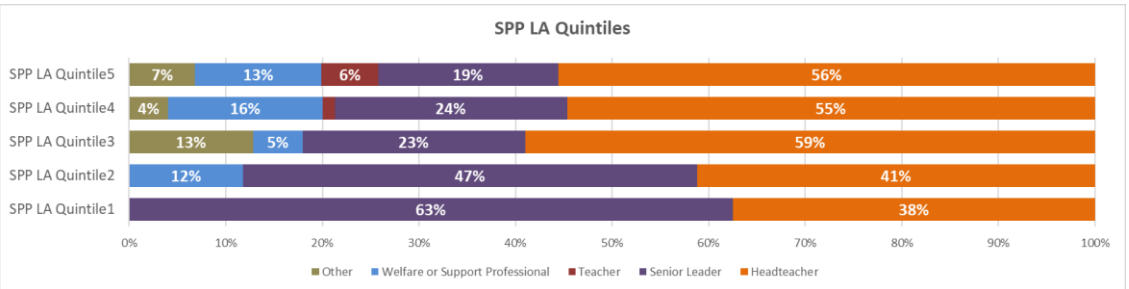
C.1 Proportion of respondents by school type



C.2 Proportion of respondents by main Service of Service children cohort



C.3 Proportion of respondents by percentage of roll who are Service children



C.4 Proportion of respondents by LA Quintile for Service Pupil Premium