



House of Commons
Defence Committee

**Educating Service
Children: Government
Response to the
Committee's Eleventh
Report of Session
2005–06**

First Special Report of Session 2006–07

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The Defence Committee

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Report

The Defence Committee published its Eleventh Report of Session 2005–06 on Educating Service Children on 6 September 2006, as House of Commons paper HC 1054. The Government's response to this report was received on 14 November 2006. This is appended below.

Appendix: Government response

1. We welcome the report by the House of Commons Defence Committee on their inquiry into the education of the children of Service families. This has been a thorough review of the key issues faced by Service families in ensuring that their children get the best possible education regardless of any factors of Service life that might have an impact. We believe that all children deserve an equal opportunity to get the best start in life, including the best possible education. The Government has looked closely at the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Committee and the full response is shown below, set out for each recommendation made in the report.

The web forum provided an opportunity for us to hear the views of, and communicate with, a broad range of people, including those based overseas. We regret that SCE staff and schools were not actively encouraged to participate from the beginning but welcome the MoD's acceptance that there is no reason why MoD employees should not contribute to fora of this kind if their purpose is to relay personal experience rather than comment on Government policy. We consider the forum to have been a valuable experience and we intend to build on this experience in future inquiries. (Paragraph 1)

2. We are pleased that the web forum was successful and applaud the Committee's innovative approach to information gathering for their inquiry. We both advertised and encouraged participation in the web forum. We did not intend any confusion between the principle that contributions on matters of policy made by civil servants or Service personnel should be through the chain of command, while freely made comments of personal experience could be made direct to the Committee, through the web forum or otherwise. We were happy to make this clear to Service Children's Education (SCE) staff and schools during the course of the inquiry and would give similar unambiguous advice to MoD staff in any future inquiry.

Moving schools is stressful for all children and frequent moves can have a significant detrimental impact on young people, particularly on their willingness to form friendships with their peers. Some schools have developed imaginative ways to help students settle in to their new schools. We recommend the DfES work with the MoD to develop best practice guidance for schools on helping Service children adapt as smoothly as possible to their new school environment. (Paragraph 19)

3. We are glad that the Committee has highlighted the issues that particularly face Service children, especially the high degree of disruption caused when children have to change schools to accompany their parents on new assignments. We are pleased that the Committee recognised the amount of work going on in SCE schools to mitigate the effect of this—a point regularly made in school inspection reports which indicate that the care, support and guidance offered to pupils on arriving and leaving SCE schools is 'good' and frequently 'outstanding'. The MoD and DfES project "Mitigating Mobility", led by SCE with support from the National College for School Leadership, is seeking to identify the most effective practice and will make advice on this available to all schools, both overseas and in UK, where it will have the most impact.

We are very concerned that Service children may be falling between the responsibilities of the DfES and the devolved administrations. They must act in a joined-up way to ensure continuity of education for children moving between the different parts of the UK. This is an area which the DfES needs to address urgently. We also recommend greater contact between the MoD and those in the devolved administrations responsible for education. (Paragraph 23)

4. There is regular contact between the MoD Children’s Education Advisory Service (CEAS) and the education authorities in the devolved administrations. This is focussed on resolving individual issues and on some of the generic problems which Service families face as they move into, or between, the devolved administrations of the UK. As part of the review of the MoD Tri-Service Schools Liaison Policy, however, it is intended to introduce a cross-UK forum (the devolved administrations, DfES and MoD) to identify and address any of the more underlying issues. In particular it will seek to promote better communication and understanding of the key issues between the different parties responsible for the education of children.

Mobility can negatively affect a student’s educational attainment, particularly in the lead-up to key stages and GCSEs and A levels. We recommend that the DfES work closely with the MoD, SCE and devolved administrations to identify ways to mitigate the impact of mobility. (Paragraph 24)

5. We strongly support the recommendation of the Committee, which is aware of work that was already underway in this area. The core aim of the “Mitigating Mobility” project, led by SCE on behalf of both MoD and DfES (the National College for School Leadership) is to both identify how to mitigate the impact of mobility and promote action to do so. The MoD recognises that a move during a critical stage of education can be particularly disruptive for children and the Service assigning authorities seek to avoid such moves of personnel wherever possible. Where, despite this, there is a clear operational imperative for the Service person to move, the option still exists for the Service Family Accommodation at the current location to be retained in order to provide educational stability. Regardless of this the intent of “Mitigating Mobility” is to find other good practice and positive examples of support that could be used by all schools.

The MoD and local education authorities should begin planning for the impact that the creation of Super Garrisons will have on pupil numbers in schools located near Service bases. (Paragraph 26)

6. We agree that it is important to have good interaction between the MoD and local authorities when there is any planning for a significant change in the footprint of establishments and, therefore, the Service community. Although the term Super Garrisons has been used to describe a concept for future Army basing it should not be taken to mean that there will be any immediate or sudden change in locations of establishments, units and formations. Instead it is intended that there will be a gradual and carefully planned transition to co-location where this makes practical and operational sense, but spread over at least the next 15–20 years and on into the future.

7. All medium and large scale projects that might result in the relocation of a significant number of staff—such as the recently announced unit relocations from Germany to UK—

have specific project teams that use the Defence Estates Regional Socio-Economic Reports and Regulatory Impact Assessment process to identify any of the significant requirements of a proposed move, including the impact on local infrastructure such as schools. The assessment process has been recently reviewed and updated and additional emphasis on the need to take essential local services into account has been included. The output of such plans is shared with local authorities so that the impact can be taken into account in planning future service provision for those living in the area. The review of the Tri-Service Schools Liaison Policy will look at how the link between Defence and local authorities could work better.

We note the importance of regular communications between deployed Service personnel and their families. Young people can feel particular anxiety during this time and their educational attainment and general well-being can be affected. The provision of communication facilities, and the regular opportunity to use them, can help both Service personnel and their families maintain their morale during operational tours. (Paragraph 32)

8. The MoD is very mindful of the importance of providing sufficient equipment in operational theatres to enable early and regular communications between Service personnel and their families. Indeed, after the provision of Operational Location terminals to logistics personnel, the provision of welfare communications is the highest priority for the Personnel Branch at the Permanent Joint Headquarters, who ensure that the movement of the necessary equipment is included in the initial logistics in-load.

9. Regardless of this, high-intensity combat operations in an austere environment present particular challenges to the maintenance of regular welfare communications and, while such services can usually be quickly established and maintained at permanent base locations, this will not always be the case at temporary forward locations. Personnel from the permanent bases may be required to temporarily rotate through the forward locations, as is the case in some parts of Afghanistan. To complement the provision of communications equipment at the permanent bases, forward locations are provided with Iridium satellite telephones and Textlink mobile e-mail terminals on a ratio sufficient to ensure that every individual has the opportunity to send e-mails and make their 30 minutes of calls per week. This provision of welfare communications to operational locations is constantly reviewed and has been enhanced again in recent months.

The difficulties experienced by some Service families in getting their child assessed by an educational psychologist for Statementing purposes and the consequent delays in the provision of support to those children is unacceptable. Schools and local authorities should give the needs of Service children with Special Needs equal priority to those of any other child. (Paragraph 42)

10. The Government responded to this recommendation as part of its response to the recent report of the Education and Skills Select Committee's inquiry into Special Educational Needs (SEN) published on 11th October. That response stated that the purpose of the statementing process is to ensure that children with more severe and complex needs are assessed individually and that suitable provision is made to meet their individual needs.

11. Where necessary, local authorities have duties to assess children's SEN, to draw up statements setting out children's individual needs and the provision to meet those needs and a duty to arrange the educational provision set out on the statement, making funding available so that that provision can be made. Regulations set out the timescales for assessments and statements and they apply to all children, including the children of Service families. Funding should be available to meet a statemented child's individual SEN wherever the child is placed and local authorities have a duty to ensure that the educational provision set out in a statement is made with the funding they make available. The Government is taking forward a long-term strategy to build the capacity of the education system to identify and meet children's special educational needs as quickly as possible and improve the outcomes they achieve. Progress in this is being kept under review.

We are concerned at the evidence we have received that SCE lacks sufficient numbers of educational psychologists. We call upon the MoD to ensure that SCE schools are able to call on the services of accredited educational psychologists within a reasonable time. (Paragraph 43)

12. We welcome the attention given to children with special needs. This is something that MoD takes very seriously and there has been considerable investment in recent years. It is not clear why the Committee has come to the conclusion that SCE lacks sufficient Educational Psychologists and this was not the view of OFSTED in their most recent report on SCE. SCE has 4.5 Educational Psychologists for every 10,000 children—which compares very favourably with the 2.3 per 10,000 in England and 3.0 in Scotland. Having said that, we are very conscious of the need to have the best possible support in the area of Pupil and Family Services and SCE has recently restructured the branch concerned to ensure that resources can be targeted most effectively.

We recommend that the DfES and the MoD consider introducing, as a priority, a system whereby Service children with Special Needs are given a Statement of educational needs which can be taken with them as they move between schools, and is accepted by schools as the basis for support which they will provide. The Statement should be time-limited and reviewed regularly. (Paragraph 44)

13. There is already a statutory process for the transfer of statements governed by the SEN Regulations and explained in paragraphs 8:113 to 8:115 of the SEN Code of Practice. The Code explains that where a child moves from one authority to another the old authority must transfer the statement to the new authority which, in turn, must tell the parents within six weeks of the date of transfer when they will review the statement and whether they propose to re-assess the child. Until such time as the new authority amends the statement they are under a statutory duty to arrange the educational provision set out on the statement, subject to having to make a temporary placement in a new school if the school named on the statement is now too far away from the child's new home.

14. The Government understands the difficulties of statemented children who move frequently but it is important that the local authorities arranging the extra provision for these children do so on the basis of proper assessment of their additional needs. For statemented children who move between authorities in England there are regulations governing the transfer of information and the timing of decisions on reviewing statements or reassessing children. Previously statemented children who come back to England from

other countries may have been away for a considerable period in which their needs may have changed significantly and they may need to be re-assessed. The important thing is that information on the child's SEN is passed quickly and efficiently between authorities. The Government's current focus on information sharing as part of *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* reinforces the messages in the SEN Code of Practice about the importance of timely and effective information sharing.

We note the former Defence Minister's tentative suggestion of a "Statementing passport" for Service children with special needs. We recommend that the feasibility of a Statementing passport be explored further by his successor. (Paragraph 45)

15. We intend to introduce a new cross-UK forum (referred to in response to Recommendation 3) which will consider cross-border issues. This will provide a useful forum in which to discuss the issue of statemented children moving back into UK from overseas and between the devolved administrations.

Service parents need reliable and accessible information when making key decisions about their child's education. We note the positive feedback we received from parents who had used the Children's Education Advisory Service but also the low profile of the CEAS amongst the Service parents we met. We recommend that the MoD provide the necessary resources to raise the profile of the CEAS amongst Service families so that it can provide its important advice service to a larger number of Service parents. (Paragraph 49)

16. We welcome the Committee's recognition that CEAS has proved very successful and popular with Service families but also recognise the need to raise the profile of CEAS. The MoD is addressing this issue by: a programme of roadshows to different locations which has already started, which informs parents of the free help, support and guidance on offer; developing more comprehensive briefing packs, particularly for more remote locations; and further developing the CEAS website. The recent addition of Parent Support Officers to the CEAS staff will also help to improve the level of direct support to parents. In promoting access to valuable information for making key decisions on children's education, the MoD has also started working with The Good Schools Guide to see how their comprehensive database on UK state and independent schools, and international schools overseas, can be made available to Service families.

We believe that in today's information age, a website is an essential conduit for information between organisations and clients. We recommend that the MoD provide the CEAS with the necessary resources for an effective and visible website and that it do so speedily. (Paragraph 50)

17. We concur that an effective Internet presence is an important part of promoting any service. The CEAS website has already been significantly revised and will undergo further development. It is now much more accessible, both from the perspective of visibility from the Internet (directly through search engines or linked from other relevant MoD and Service websites) and in ease of use. But we accept that more could be done with this aspect of communicating the support available and will look for more ways to improve the CEAS Internet presence.

While it may seem curious that the MoD should be responsible for providing schools, it is unquestionably the Department with the closest interest in the education of Service children and the issues facing them. We see no reason to call for any change in the status of SCE as an MoD agency. (Paragraph 59)

18. We accept the Committee view that the current arrangements for the status of SCE as an Agency of the MoD represent the best solution for Service schools overseas and currently there are no plans to change this.

Both the MoD and the DfES expressed satisfaction with their current working relationship with regard to SCE schools, but saw potential for closer collaboration. We are concerned by the Minister for School's description of the DfES relationship with the MoD as "hands-off". We believe closer collaboration and a greater interest in Service children by the DfES to be essential. (Paragraph 60)

19. The Government acknowledges that, while the current relationship between DfES and MoD with regard to SCE schools is working satisfactorily, there is potential for the two Departments to liaise more closely in this respect. Officials from the DfES sit on the SCE Owners' Board which meets regularly to advise on education best practice and the setting of key targets. When policy is being developed in DfES it is important that the implications for SCE should be considered as a matter of routine and that MoD (SCE) should be consulted in the same way as local authorities in England. The DfES will undertake to make greater efforts to ensure that SCE schools are kept in mind and that the MoD is consulted when policy is being developed.

The written evidence we have received, and the contributions posted to our web forum, were generally positive about the quality of schooling provided by SCE schools, particularly at primary level. (Paragraph 64)

20. We welcome the Committee's recognition of the high standard of education provided in Service schools and are pleased that the evidence—which places SCE in the top 25 out of 150 local authorities in England—is borne out by the opinion of families and others involved.

We are not convinced by the reasons given by the MoD for the governance arrangements for SCE schools and recommend that the MoD consider the feasibility of giving Schools Advisory Committees powers equivalent to those exercised by governing bodies in UK maintained schools. We believe that this would help to ensure that high standards of performance are achieved. In the short term, the MoD should take steps to ensure that members of Schools Advisory Committees assume a more active role in school life and that they receive appropriate training to do this effectively. (Paragraph 69)

21. The report acknowledges that SCE is in the process of strengthening the role of its Schools Advisory Committees. These changes will significantly increase the responsibilities of Schools Advisory Committees which in future will have 3 main roles:

- To provide a strategic view—setting the broad framework within which the Head Teacher and staff should run the school.

- To act as a critical friend—providing the Head Teacher and staff with support, advice and information.
- To ensure accountability—holding the Head Teacher to account on the school's performance and other matters.

These changes will give School Governance Committees (as they will now be called) responsibilities much closer to those exercised by governing bodies in the UK. Given the quite different nature of recruiting staff for service schools overseas, we do not believe it either right or feasible to give these governing bodies the power to appoint and dismiss Head Teachers or other staff. However, they most certainly should, and will have, a say in the process. We believe that the advantages that come through centralised management of SCE schools, benefits both the children and the teaching staff. Having said that, we fully support the concept of local accountability and the Agency will continue to empower Head Teachers and School Governance Committees whenever and wherever it is sensible to do so.

We welcome the MoD's commitment to give additional funding to SCE to match increases to the DfES budget, but we are concerned to ensure that this funding is provided by HM Treasury rather than from already allocated MoD resources. We expect the Treasury to make available proportional funding to the MoD whenever it increases the schools budget. We expect the MoD to ensure that parity funding for SCE schools continues. (Paragraph 76)

22. The Government is content that HM Treasury takes SCE funding requirements into account as part of the Spending Review process. The MoD recognises the need to articulate those requirements as part of the Spending Review and will continue to look at the funding of SCE in relation to the funding of schools in England. We acknowledge that the provision of high quality education in Service schools plays an important part in meeting the responsibilities of the Government towards the Service community.

It is vital that the interests of SCE schools are taken into account when DfES initiatives are introduced, and that SCE is resourced adequately to implement them. (Paragraph 80)

23. The Government is committed to giving all children the best possible start in life and this is why investment in education has continued to rise in recent years. It is important that the benefits that this represents are felt equally in Service schools. The DfES will ensure that the MoD is kept aware of any new initiatives and that where this is reflected in new funding, the implications for SCE will be considered as a matter of routine.

We recommend that the MoD consider broadening its criteria for deciding which of its contract workers are eligible for free education in SCE schools. It appears unfair that some contracted staff, performing important responsibilities for the Services, are not entitled to free schooling in SCE schools. (Paragraph 84)

24. It is possible that the evidence available to the Committee on the subject of eligibility for places in SCE schools was insufficiently clear and has led to some misunderstanding of the current arrangements. The regulations (Joint Service Publication 342, Education of Service Children) identify 3 categories:

- Children entitled to education free of cost to parents—this includes the children of Service personnel and MoD civilian staff on UK based terms of service.
- Children entitled to places in SCE schools but on a repayment basis—this includes the children of a wide range of employees of Service institutions and welfare organisations, such as NAAFI and SSAFA-Forces Help.
- Children not entitled to places in SCE schools and who can only be admitted where there is spare capacity, on a repayment basis—this includes the children of any contractual staff who are overseas at the behest of their employer, under arrangements made solely by that employer.

No contract workers are eligible for free education in Service schools but the way in which the fees are collected varies depending on the wishes of the employer. Some companies enter contracts with the MoD that include the provision of education at SCE schools, in which case no additional charges are raised on the contractor's employees. Some companies pay any fees on behalf of their employees as part of their contract with their employees. Some companies do not include any provision for education in which case charges must be paid by those employees. This is a matter between the companies involved and their employees, depending on the nature of the contract between them; it is not a matter for the MoD.

We were surprised to discover that there does not seem to be a clear working definition of what a Service child is. Without an accepted definition, a reliable figure for the number of Service children cannot be determined and decisions about funding for Service children and the tracking of the educational attainment of Service children, is not possible. (Paragraph 88)

25. Dependants of Service personnel are defined for many different purposes and this can normally be traced back to relevant legislation. Comprehensive guidance on what constitutes a dependent child of a Service person for the purpose of entitlement to access to Service schools is included in Joint Service Publication 342, the Education of Service Children. A record of dependant children of Service personnel is kept by the single Services for their own personnel and the Service person is required to keep such records up to date. Joint Personnel Administration, the new tri-Service administration system, will include management reports that show the numbers of children (and other dependants) in different countries. Tracking the educational attainment of individual Service children is a different issue and, while this is done as a matter of course in Service schools, it is not currently possible to do so for the children of Service personnel in schools in UK. It will be possible to do so once a marker for Service children is included on the School Census.

We recommend that the MoD and the DfES treat as a Service child any child of school age whose parent has served in the UK Armed Forces during that child's school career. (Paragraph 90)

26. The Government does not accept that such a broad definition of a Service child would be helpful for most purposes. With the typical throughput of the Armed Forces this would generate a very large population of "Service children", the vast majority of whom no longer had a serving parent or any connection to the Service community. If anything this would overwhelm and disguise the group of children who were in families with a currently

serving parent or parents. It is highly questionable whether former members of the Armed Forces would agree to such a label for their children for the rest of those children's educational lives and doubtful, therefore, that they would declare them as such to schools for the purposes of the School Census. The existing working definition with respect to the Census—the dependent child, of school age, of a serving Service person or persons—is considered appropriate.

We recognise that many LEAs do not have a significant number of Service children in their schools and would gain little benefit if the PLASC included a requirement for schools to identify Service children. For the DfES to reject the proposal on the ground that a sample focus group was not in favour is simply ridiculous, and a sad reflection of the importance which the DfES attaches to Service children. The collection of data on the number of Service children, through the national PLASC census, would bring benefit to the DfES, the MoD, SCE and LEAs. This information would assist the targeting of resources for Service children more effectively and enable trends in the attainment of Service children to be established. (Paragraph 95)

27. The Government agrees that including a marker on the School Census to identify Service children would be beneficial and would allow important research into the outcomes for these children. It is also important to review separately and impartially any requests for extra data collection because there are many calls to do so and any additional burden on schools and local authorities must be well justified. In this case, the collection is justified and data will be collected from the 2008 Census.

We do not consider its inclusion in the PLASC exercise would prove unduly burdensome for schools and the benefits it would bring are considerable. We recommend strongly that the DfES include a Service children marker in its annual PLASC exercise. (Paragraph 96)

28. The Government agrees that including a marker on the School Census to identify Service children would be helpful and would enable important research to be conducted into the outcomes for these children. A Service child indicator will be introduced as soon as possible (the School Census for 2008). This will enable schools to record within their management information systems whether a child is the child of a serving member of the Armed Forces. The requirement will be defined in such a way as to minimise the burden on those schools with few or no Service children.

29. However, the Census only covers England. The MoD and the devolved administrations will collaborate in finding ways of collecting this data from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

All LEAs face different challenges and demands on their resources. Significant disparities in the funding needs of individual schools exist within LEAs. We believe that it is appropriate that funding decisions concerning individual schools are made at a local level, by LEAs, through its locally-determined funding formula. We commend to LEAs the example of Wiltshire County Council which provides additional funding for its schools with significant numbers of Service children. (Paragraph 102)

30. The Government accepts the Committee's recommendation that decisions about the funding for individual schools with significant numbers of Service children should

continue to be made locally through the local funding formula, making appropriate use of pupil mobility and Service children formula factors. We think this is the best way for the particular circumstances of all the schools in each area to be taken into account in the local distribution of resources, and we acknowledge the expertise in this area developed by authorities with large numbers of Service children, including Wiltshire.

While we recognise the logistical challenge and the need for occasional unexpected postings, we recommend that the MoD adopt a more rigorous target for notice of postings. (Paragraph 105)

31. It is important to recognise that the challenge is not simply one of logistics but rather the compelling need to meet operational outputs, which drives the movement of personnel and, where accompanied, their families. The reassignment of personnel is the responsibility of the single Service assigning authorities, all of whom have key targets for the length of notice of a new assignment that they aspire to give personnel. Although in general those targets are being met the MoD and the Services are keen to reduce turbulence and increase notice wherever possible, but this must be seen in the context of some significant ongoing reorganisation and relocation. Feedback on notice of reassignment is monitored through the Continuous Attitude Surveys, which do not highlight lack of notice of reassignment as a critical issue. Nevertheless, the MoD will continue to look for ways in which the most notice can be given, particularly for those who need to make more complex arrangements, such as admissions to schools for their children.

We recommend that the MoD consider how parents living abroad can be assisted better to find schools in the UK, particularly when their spouse is away on an operational deployment. (Paragraph 109)

32. This is an important aspect of the support for the Service community in what can be challenging circumstances. It is a core role of CEAS to support Service families in this position and we hope that the further publicity in place and planned for CEAS—including roadshows that have already taken place in overseas Garrisons—will help alert families to what has been acknowledged is a valuable service. It is worth noting that those families facing the biggest challenge—those with children with registered Statements of Special Educational Need—get more direct support from CEAS and are entitled to a return trip to the UK at public expense to make future educational arrangements for their child.

We welcome the commitment by the Minister for Schools that the DfES would advise local authorities to accept unit postal addresses from which to apply to new schools. (Paragraph 110)

33. The Government acknowledges that the Committee welcomes the changes proposed in the School Admissions Code. The draft Code was published on 8 September for consultation and contains the following advice to admission authorities and local authorities:

- they must ensure that the needs of the children of Service families are taken into account;
- school places must be allocated in advance if the applicant would meet the criteria when they return to the UK;

- a Service representative must be invited to join the area's Admission Forum;
- a Unit postal address must be accepted for applications from Service personnel in the absence of a new home postal address; and
- school places should be allocated to children and their families in advance of the approaching school year, if accompanied by an official MOD letter declaring a return date.

When the responses to the consultation have been analysed, the final version of the Code will be laid before Parliament for approval in order to come into effect in early February 2007 to take effect for admission to schools in September 2008, or before for in-year admissions.

34. The DfES is planning a review of in-year admissions of Service children and will undertake to include recommendations for admission authorities in the final version of the Code.

We note the difficulties that Head Teachers of schools located near Service bases have experienced owing to poor communication with the MoD about planned postings. Postings to, and away from, military bases can have a profound effect on a school's ability to budget and plan effectively. It is vital that the MoD informs schools and LEAs as early as possible about its intended postings. There is an urgent need to improve this aspect of MoD's performance. (Paragraph 115)

35. We accept that this is an area for improvement. The MoD will lead on a review of the Tri-Service Schools Liaison Policy, which operates at three levels: inter-Departmental, local authority and school. One of the key areas for further development will be the identification of more effective ways in which schools and local authorities, or the equivalent authorities in the devolved administrations, can be informed of any significant changes in pupil numbers as the result of planned moves.

We are concerned that the records of Service children are frequently transferred between schools well beyond the 15 day requirement set by DfES regulation. In the age of e-mail and instant electronic communication, there can be no excuse for not transferring records within the 15 day regulation. Delays in the transfer of student records mean that the new teacher has to take additional time to assess a child and specify suitable learning plans. In extreme cases delays could harm a child's learning development. We call on the DfES to take steps to enforce the 15 day requirement for the transfer of student records. (Paragraph 120)

36. The Government acknowledges the Committee's concerns that Service children are disadvantaged when they move school because some schools fail to transfer pupils' records on time. Schools are under a statutory duty to pass on (electronically where possible) the common transfer file containing basic pupil details, in addition to the pupil's educational record. This must be done within 15 days of the child ceasing to be registered at a maintained school and becoming registered at a new one (either maintained or independent). Regulations are in place to make provision for this. The duty is on maintained schools in England but applies to transfers of records to other schools (maintained or otherwise) in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

37. The Government will take steps to ensure that this 15 day requirement is met by continuing to make all schools aware that records must be transferred within 15 school days of the receipt of the request. The DfES will continue to explain and publicise the 15 day transfer rule to all schools, and will continue to use Teachernet, Schoolsweb and Spectrum (the regular communication channels between DfES and all schools) to do this.

We recognise the importance of pre-school provision for Service families in the UK and recommend that the MoD give consideration to this. (Paragraph 121)

38. It is not clear whether the Committee is referring to free pre-school provision, pre-school childcare or both, but submissions to the Committee made clear that the MoD understands the importance of pre-school provision for Service families. Many establishments already have childcare facilities (generally through a combination of charitable grants, fees and unit/establishment support) on site and the MoD is developing a more comprehensive childcare strategy for the support of Service personnel and their families. The MoD will ensure that all of the necessary provision that parents are entitled to is being made.

39. The DfES recognises that families may, for a variety of reasons, move around the country (more frequently for the families of Service personnel), and the DfES makes clear in statutory guidance underpinning the free entitlement that local authorities should make appropriate arrangements to ensure that children commencing with or moving between providers during the course of the term are supported. The guidance is clear that parents are not to be charged for any part of the free entitlement regardless of when or where they choose to take up that entitlement.

40. The Government has put significant funding into pre-school education and this will increase over the coming years. The new Childcare Act places new duties on local authorities to strengthen their role in helping to maintain a strong and sustainable childcare market so it meets the needs of all parents, including those from the families of service personnel.

41. From April 2007 local authorities will have a duty to assess the sufficiency of childcare in their area which will include childcare for the children of Service personnel who live in their area. Local authorities will use the assessment to identify where existing childcare does not meet the needs of children and families, and from 2008 will have a duty to secure, as far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient childcare.

Educating Service children is often referred to in terms of the difficulties it presents and obstacles to overcome. We note that during our inquiry we have been told about many of the positive aspects of educating Service children, which for many teachers proves to be a satisfying experience. (Paragraph 124)

42. We welcome this recognition that those involved in the education of Service children have felt able to freely acknowledge that it is a positive and satisfying experience. We believe that this demonstrates that much of the policy and structure in place is conducive to a successful outcome for those children, but we aspire to improve this further by addressing those areas that the Committee has highlighted in this report.

We recommend that the MoD commission research on the reasons for lower take-up of CEA among lower-paid ranks. In particular, this research should focus on any financial or cultural reasons for the lower take-up of the CEA by lower-paid ranks. (Paragraph 132)

43. The MoD accepts that the Committee has concerns about the profile of take-up of CEA, though submissions to the Committee demonstrated that, for demographic reasons, the profile is not significantly skewed. MoD will examine the take-up of CEA across the ranks in more detail and will use this work to inform any further consideration of the eligibility rules for CEA.

The two schools have different roles but both are popular: admissions to the Queen Victoria School and the Duke of York's Royal Military School are over-subscribed. While the Queen Victoria School and the Duke of York's Royal Military School are clearly anachronisms, we see no reason to recommend any change to their status. (Paragraph 138)

44. We accept the Committee's recommendation and welcome their support for Queen Victoria School and Duke of York's Royal Military School, both of which provide an important alternative and represent more choice for Service families in the education of their children.

45. This has been a wide ranging and thorough inquiry into the education of the children of Service families and we are grateful to the Committee for their effort and engagement in this important area. We welcome the recognition by the Committee of some very positive and successful delivery of, and support for, the education of children in the Service community and acknowledge that the Government has more to do in some areas. This reply sets out how the Government has been responding to the need to ensure that the children of Service families are getting the best possible education and explains what additional steps will now be taken. We share the Committee's desire to see these children get the support and opportunities that they need in order to succeed.