Department for Education Call for Evidence:

Provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, and for those who need alternative provision: how the financial arrangements work

Armed Forces Families Federations Observations

Introduction

1. The three Armed Forces Families Federations welcome the opportunity to provide evidence to the Department for Education (DfE) as part of this consultation process. We recognise that some Armed Forces families do have positive experiences, with regards to their child's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision, but we are aware that others can face disadvantage due to the mobile nature of Armed Forces life.

2. Whilst we are unable to respond to the technical aspects of many of the funding questions posed as part of this call for evidence, we would like to take this opportunity to highlight some of the key issues and challenges that can arise for Armed Forces families. We believe that the current funding mechanisms for SEND support could be the root cause of some of their concerns and would ask that our evidence is taken into consideration as part of the review.

Context

3. According to the Ministry of Defence (MOD) Families Continuous Attitude Survey 2019, 53% of Armed Forces families have at least one child of school age, 23% of the Armed Forces population moved for Service reasons in the previous year and 28% of families had a child change school in the previous 12 months.

4. Our mobile population are only a subset of the whole, but those personnel who are mobile will move as frequently as every 18 months – 3 years 'on assignment', around England and between the Devolved Administrations and overseas. This creates issues with transferring provision, within an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), a Service Children's Assessment of Need (SCAN) or if no formal documentation has yet been generated which states the support required. There is variation in the support and resources available between Local Authorities (LAs), and even between schools within the same LA, and this can create confusion, anxiety and frustration for families who have to move so frequently. As one parent told us *"a family who move from county to county should not have to go through the whole process time and time again…"*

5. The Families Federations work closely with the Children's Education Advisory Service (CEAS), who sit within the Ministry of Defence's Directorate of Children and Young People. Their role is to provide expert support to Armed Forces families who have specific issues or concerns regarding their child's education. We frequently refer

families to the CEAS team and are aware that they will also be submitting a paper in response to this call for evidence, with additional statistical data that will support the observations made in this document.

Resources

6. Families tell us that they have experienced issues with school places because schools do not have the resources or funding to support the provision requirement or there are just simply no school places available. Some Armed Forces children have been left without a school place for months when moving to a new LA and on occasion have been forced into home schooling.

7. Many Armed Forces families straddle LA borders, so their children are schooled in a different county to that in which they live, and this can lead to disparity in the provision that can be given in school, such as Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Health Therapy. Funding differences between LAs can also be a factor when waiting for a school place out of area. An example of this is occurs in Hampshire, where they provide funding based on hours of one-to-one support, whereas Wiltshire has a mechanism for block funding. This results in the initial SEND funding in Hampshire being less than would be provided in the neighbouring county, so authorities in Wiltshire have had to provide top-up funding for children who live there but who are schooled across the border.

8. We have received evidence about the lack of availability of specialist SEND school places in some LAs. The frequency of moves and the duration of some assignments means that families often find themselves at the bottom of the list for accessing SEND provision and have to fight for a suitable school place each time they move. Parents tell us that they feel coerced into sending their child to mainstream schooling with the promise of support being made available in future. Often this support does not materialise and the child's condition or behaviour deteriorates, resulting in exclusion. Families have also raised issues about SEND provision in secondary schools, particularly when there is a late diagnosis or when a requirement for an EHCP has arisen.

9. There is a perception amongst some families that LAs are taking the low-cost option by either not agreeing to an EHCP assessment or deciding not to go forward with provision of an EHCP. Other families have told us that they felt that this is the case when their child is refused specialist provision or not given a place at the school of their choice and they believe that their children are being disadvantaged because of their mobility.

10. The Families Federations have also been contacted by school staff seeking information about options for additional funding when Armed Forces children with significant SEND requirements have been admitted to their schools. These situations have occurred because they have been unaware of these significant additional needs and therefore funding was not immediately available to support them.

Funding

11. It is clear that some families do not understand the funding system for SEND or receive enough information to allow them to participate in the process effectively. Families feel that, instead of concentrating on their child's wellbeing, they are forced to become financial, medical and health experts. Parents told us that for them to access any funding involves stress, delays and a fight - *"we've had to fight for everything that is documented in our son's EHCP".* Examples of such delays reported to the Families

Federations include a child who spent 10-15 months on a waiting list for CAMHS (which is longer than some families reside in the same area for an assignment) and another family who had to fight for 4 years to access the correct support for a child with an EHCP. The impracticability and unsuitability of this system for a mobile family is clear.

12. Families also perceive that it is too difficult for schools to access the funding they need to meet the needs of children with SEND whilst in the process of assessment/diagnosis (particularly in terms of TA assistance and 1:1 support). The burden of proof is believed to be far too high and parents perceive that when schools are struggling financially, children with SEND, and particularly mobile Armed Forces ones, can be seen as a drain on finite resources.

Impact on Family Life

13. This case study comes from one of our Armed Forces families, who has spoken about the impact of having children with SEND. We have included this as we believe it illustrates the impact that the current funding provision is having on our families and it is typical of the type of concerns that are raised to us. To provide some context to this case, this mobile family live in Service Families Accommodation (SFA) and their current house is their 13th in ten years.

"This week I was asked to write a short summary on the effects that education funding has on my family. The irony of this week of all weeks doesn't escape me. Every night this week I have cried, I am broken emotionally and physically. I cried at the lack of support my children are receiving, so much so that at the ages of 7 and 10 they are begging me to be home-schooled because they themselves feel like they can't take anymore.

We live in a village with a small primary school which covers up to, and including, year 6. Funding cuts have seen a loss in staff, meaning that we have combined age classes and TA's are only employed in the mornings. The head teacher is also having to be the SENCO because they cannot afford to pay a teacher extra to do this.

My son has an EHCP and requires a 1:1 as he is at physical risk of injuring himself; he also requires support in all aspects of education. He has seen his interventions scaled back to the bare minimum, while educationally he is falling more and more behind. He has been separated from a majority of his year group and put with a younger age group, which has created emotional and mental wellbeing issues. We have had referrals to get him some technical support to make his life more accessible, but after almost a whole academic year this still hasn't been done as the Head Teacher's workload is overwhelming.

My daughter, who is Autistic and has Sensory Processing, hasn't been able to access Thrive Intervention because there are not enough hours to facilitate this. Her mental well-being has taken a drastic dive since the class mergers. We have waited over 6 months for the school to submit an EHCP application and again because of lack of funded hours this hasn't happened.

I feel like we are currently being completely failed by our education system. The schools available budget cannot facilitate the basic needs of my SEN children; even with my sons EHCP funding it does not even cover the wages of a much needed 1:1"

Conclusion

14. The Families Federations have evidence to suggest that:

    - Mobile Armed Forces families face disadvantage in the current system
    - A lack of resources leads to gaps in education for Armed Forces children with SEND
    - The transfer of SEND provision is too complex and slow for mobile families
    - Parents do not understand the funding system well enough to enable them to participate effectively in the process
    - The impact on family and Service life cannot be understated, as demonstrated by our case study.

15. We would ask that the following recommendations be considered as part of this funding consultation process and also as part of any future review undertaken which includes the transfer of SEND provision:

    - DfE to remove disadvantage for Armed Forces families who move across county and country borders on assignment, often with little choice or notice.
    - A formal training programme to be made available to teaching staff, and those involved in the funding process, to raise awareness of the needs of Service children with SEND and the additional challenges they face because of the demands of Armed Forces life.
    - More details about SEND funding, the processes and procedures involved and the widely differing LA policies to be made more freely available to families in a clear, accessible and unambiguous format, so that they can make informed decisions

16. Our children deserve the best start in life and their education and development should not be adversely affected because their parents are serving in the Armed Forces. The Families Federations would therefore welcome the opportunity for further engagement with the DfE to discuss the issues raised in this paper in more detail. The policy leads for this subject are:

Naval Families Federation

Bridget Nicholson E: bridget.nicholson@nff.org.uk / T: 023 9265 4374

Army Families Federation

Karen Ross E: additionalneeds@aff.org.uk / T: 07552 861 983

RAF Families Federation

Louise Briggs E: louise.briggs@raf-ff.org.uk / T: 01780 781650

31st July 2019