



# Terms of *endearment*

Moving to a new school can be a daunting prospect for any child and especially so for those from military families. With the new academic year about to start, we asked educational establishments for their advice on how teachers, parents and pupils can make the transition easy for everyone involved...

**Pictures (clockwise from top left):** The stately main building at Clifton College. The modern STEM block at Heathfield School. A grand environment awaits at St Lawrence College Farleigh School.



## FROM making new friends to navigating unfamiliar corridors, starting out at a new school is a daunting prospect for even the most confident of children.

But while settling into different surroundings is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for the majority of youngsters, soldier parents' postings can make it a regular part of growing up for children from Army families.

Thankfully for pupils from a Service background, their resilience and adaptability is being bolstered by educational establishments dedicated to ensuring

the move to secondary school – or the transition from one school to another – goes as smoothly as possible.

Chris Russell, executive principal of Dover's The Duke of York's Royal Military School (DOYRMS), told *Army&You* that one of his team's most important missions is to steady the educational ship for new arrivals who may have headed through turbulent waters.

"Their education has been significantly disrupted due to the mobile nature of Service life," he explained.

"They may have covered some areas of the primary and secondary school

syllabus more than once and other areas not at all.

"DOYRMS assesses every student when they join us to understand what additional support they may need.

"They are grateful that the school can provide stability and continuity of education to them."

Stability is also the watchword at Haberdashers' Monmouth Schools, where staff members operate a support network to help the youngsters in their care to settle quickly and comfortably.

A spokesman said: "Many Forces children have moved and changed schools several times, [so] we would like them to feel

a sense of permanence and stability with us, knowing they will have the chance to make friends for life and build up a rapport with teaching staff."

At the Benedictine Downside School in Somerset, staff do their best to help new arrivals integrate seamlessly into their new surroundings.

Alastair Falzon, Director of Pastoral Care, said: "We find that the pupils themselves do not have any major concerns – they are keen to settle in and we encourage them to involve themselves in the life of the school right from the off."

As a base for children from serving Forces families for more than 150 years, staff at Clifton College are well-versed in providing a stable environment for pupils.

Admissions manager James Breeze explained that newcomers are assigned a "buddy" from the same house and class to help them get used to their new surroundings.

He added: "The house matrons, tutors and housemasters and mistresses are on hand to provide support whenever needed.

"The matrons at Clifton take on the role of helping pupils keep up those precious family routines – this may be reading to a child before they go to bed or baking with them at weekend."

## HOME FROM HOME

If a pupil is enrolled at a boarding school, homesickness can be a more pressing concern than the curriculum – especially if it is the first time a child has lived away from their parents.

Queen Victoria School, in Dunblane, caters for the children of military personnel with a connection to Scotland and designs its schedules with pupils who may be missing their mums and dads in mind.

A spokesman said: "Boarders have constant challenges – homesickness, sharing a room with several other children, making friends, getting into new routines.

"We encourage our students to remain as busy as possible. We structure their day so that from 7am until bedtime at 9pm, there are activities to do and procedures to follow – all of which means that when it is time for lights out the children can sleep easier, satisfied that they have had a full and rewarding day."

Liz Redmond, junior boarding house parent at Andover's Farleigh School, stressed the importance of establishing a firm routine. She said: "The Boarding House programme, which includes prep, reading, spellings, music and other night-time routine

## DIRECTORY

*Interested in finding out more about schools specialising in accommodating pupils from a Service background? Check out the following for a Forces-friendly education for your child...*

### CHAFYN GROVE

**Where:** Salisbury, Wiltshire  
**They say:** We are experienced in dealing with Service families and our communication with parents is excellent. Our ethos of sport and hard work in a relaxed and supportive environment suits children from military families.

**Online:** [chafyngrove.co.uk](http://chafyngrove.co.uk)

### CHRIST COLLEGE

**Where:** Brecon, Wales  
**They say:** Pupils are well supported and advised at every stage, especially as they prepare to move on into the world of universities and work. There is something magical about this place that can only be experienced at first-hand.

**Online:** [christcollegebrecon.com](http://christcollegebrecon.com)

### CLIFTON COLLEGE

**Where:** Bristol  
**They say:** We are co-educational for children aged from two-to-18, providing stability. Clifton has high-quality teaching and pastoral care, exceptional facilities and 40 after-school clubs.

**Online:** [cliftoncollege.com](http://cliftoncollege.com)

are all undertaken by resident staff.

“The children are kept busy with after-school activities, weekend trips and events so they don’t have time to get homesick!”

Rory Johnson, headmaster at Dorset’s Hanford School, pointed out that Service children who enrol at boarding schools will typically begin at a younger age than their peers.

“We understand that for parents this can be an anxious time,” he explained. “By creating a happy environment with a ‘home-away-from-home’ feel, Hanford aims to provide the stability and continuity of education that Service pupils need.”

Aside from the initial anxiety over the prospect of boarding, the disruption to the usual day-to-day contact with their parents can prove to be another area of concern for new pupils.

But Dale Spencer, a boarding housemaster at St Lawrence College in Ramsgate, said that military children are well suited to adapting to their new lives.

“The main concerns when pupils first arrive is often how they will communicate with their mum and dad and then, of course, missing being at home – especially if it is the first time the pupil has boarded,” he added.

“However, these fears

are often short-lived and staff do everything possible to reassure pupils and help them settle.

“It is important that we ensure they have contact with their family right from the start.”

The Royal Alexandra and Albert School (RAAS), in Reigate, puts communication at the heart of its strategy, with pupils able to regularly and reliably contact their loved ones – especially through technologies such as Skype.

Putting military pupils at ease is especially important when parents have deployments looming, so Ascot’s Heathfield School engenders a sense of community to guide youngsters through unsettling times.

“There may be possible concerns over particular postings – Iraq and Afghanistan, for example,” explained registrar Isabel Hutchings. “But as most are full boarders at Heathfield, the overall feeling is that we are all in it together.”

Dauntsey’s School, in West Lavington, Wiltshire, helps boarders in years seven, eight and nine to settle in by basing them in The Manor, a co-educational boarding house.

Housemistress Anne Sampson, an ex-Forces wife, said: “Boys and girls study, socialise and

eat together, forming friendships that often last a lifetime.

“Being away from the main school site, the children are less affected by peer pressure from older pupils, leaving them free to enjoy childhood that bit longer.”

**ACE ASSISTANCE**

Years of experience have helped schools refine the service they provide to children from military families, but their policies stand or fall on the quality of the staff putting them into practice.

From the boarding housemasters taking charge of residential pupils to teachers and administrative personnel taking lessons and helping out behind the scenes, each child is supported by dedicated, knowledgeable professionals.

At Salisbury’s Chafyn Grove, each pupil has a tutor who has daily contact with the child and reports any changes to family circumstances – such as an upcoming deployment – during staff meetings.

A spokesman said: “We also have a head of

pastoral care who keeps close links with any pupils who need extra support; a school counsellor; and a ‘listening ear’ who comes in weekly with her dog to spend time with any boarders who might need someone else to talk to.”

RAAS also assesses pupils’ personalities and needs before assigning an appropriate adult to get to know them.

Each boy and girl is then monitored directly and through feedback from teachers so that any “wobbles” can be identified and dealt

*“Many Forces children have moved and changed schools several times, [so] we would like them to feel a sense of permanence and stability.”*



Pictures (clockwise from top left): Taking a break at Royal Alexandra and Albert School; Hanford School pupils step out; The military influence on show at Queen Victoria School; All smiles for students at The Wellington Academy

**DAUNTSEY'S**

**Where:** West Lavington, Wilts  
**They say:** Our values are in line with Forces families – have a go, push yourself and you will be surprised what you achieve. Make a contribution – getting involved delivers huge benefits.

**Online:** dauntseys.org

**DOWNSIDE SCHOOL**

**Where:** Radstock, Somerset  
**They say:** Downside aims to develop the character of your child, emphasising the importance of moral courage, integrity and service to others. We were voted “Best for Well-Being” in 2015.

**Online:** downside.co.uk

**THE DUKE OF YORK'S ROYAL MILITARY SCHOOL**

**Where:** Dover, Kent  
**They say:** This is an exciting, happy and vibrant community which provides extraordinary opportunities for young people to develop their academic and personal qualities.

**Online:** doyrms.com

**FARLEIGH SCHOOL**

**Where:** Andover, Wiltshire  
**They say:** Our high staff-to-child ratio means that the children not only form close bonds with the house parents and assistants, but we can also cater for individual needs.

**Online:** farleighschool.com

**FORRES SANDLE MANOR**

**Where:** Fordingbridge, Hants  
**They say:** An FSM education is unique and all of us encourage each child to aspire to achieve their best. We teach a wide range of subjects, combining our solid academic grounding with sporting and extra-curricular activities.

**Online:** fmschool.com

**Pictures (clockwise from top left):** Green surroundings at Chafyn Grove; Senior boarders enjoying their time at St Lawrence College; Attractive open spaces at Downside School; Dinner time for pupils at Ludgrove School



***“When their parents are deployed, we keep a very close pastoral eye on them and support them via our normal channels.”***

with, while a full-time Anglican chaplain with extensive experience in counselling young people is heavily involved in the boarding operation.

And as a specialist in working with children from Service families, the school encourages interest in the military through participation in its thriving cadet unit.

**WELL SUPPORTED**

While there are challenges faced by staff and parents when it comes to providing the best educational care for military

children, the number of establishments with specific plans in place to help military youngsters is heartening.

Wokingham’s Ludgrove School is one of many to use modern means of communication to address the difficulties presented by distance and make the miles apart seem less daunting.

“Technology has really helped the way in which we can support [the pupils],” explained headmaster Simon Barber. “Particularly the use of Skype and FaceTime, which enables

boys to make eye contact whilst speaking and makes a big difference to those who will not see their parents at matches.

“We try to ensure that calls take place either in the morning or at lunchtime rather than at the end of the day when the boys are tired.”

For children with parents serving overseas, Ludgrove School has a dedicated member of staff who liaises with adults to make travel arrangements, check forms and book journeys to and from airports.

Queen Victoria School focuses on building a

sense of stability for its pupils so that when a deployment crops up, children affected are able to carry on in as normal a fashion as possible with access to as much support as they need.

The school also operates a “Parents on Deployment” support group and “Seasons for Growth” scheme, which encourages student participants to talk about and confront loss.

While Downside School ensures that pupils with soldier parents receive the same standards of education and care as those without a military connection, Alastair Falzon explained that staff are aware of the added pressures deployments can bring.

He said: “When their parents are deployed, we keep a very close pastoral eye on them and support them via our normal channels.

“We also use senior prefects, who may well have gone through a similar experience, to support the pupils concerned.

“In addition, a number of our pastoral staff have first-hand experience of the armed services, whether as ex-personnel or being a member of a Forces family.”

At Tidworth’s Wellington Academy, staff with links to the military are clearly visible so that they can

be approached for advice and support. The school also enjoys a relationship with a local religious leader who makes three weekly visits.

Tania Davidson, director of boarding, told *Army&You*: “Reverend Anabel works closely with the military and is able to offer considerable support and guidance to students.

“We have exceptionally close links with family liaison officers and the Academy has a wellbeing advisor who works closely with a wide range of our students, including supporting those whose parents may have been deployed on active service.”

Farleigh School deploys a strong pastoral system to combat the unpredictability of military life.

Liz Redmond said: “Staff are flexible, so when parents return on R&R they are happy to organise for parents to come and see their children and take them home if possible.”

**HOME FRONT**

For all the help that is available to pupils once they begin at their new school, the importance of each family’s role in preparing and supporting their child cannot be understated.

Heathfield’s Isabel Hutchings advises parents to create an atmosphere of positivity

**HABERDASHERS MONMOUTH SCHOOLS**

**Where:** Monmouthshire, Wales  
**They say:** We have all the academic advantages of single-sex brother and sister schools and all of the social advantages of co-ed, with many joint after-school and weekend activities.

**Online:** habs-monmouth.org

**HANFORD SCHOOL**

**Where:** Child Okeford, Dorset  
**They say:** We are a unique school and encourage children to be children – to play, ride, run, learn and develop lifelong friendships. Many military families have chosen Hanford as it provides stability and care.

**Online:** hanford.dorset.sch.uk

**HEATHFIELD SCHOOL**

**Where:** Ascot, Berkshire  
**They say:** We offer renowned pastoral care and individual attention. Our headmistress grew up in a Service family and understands first-hand the stresses and strains.

**Online:** heathfieldschool.net

**LUDGROVE SCHOOL**

**Where:** Wokingham, Berkshire  
**They say:** We offer fantastic pastoral care from staff who care passionately. The Ludgrove spirit allows boys to thrive in an atmosphere of high achievement, happiness, good manners and kindness.

**Online:** ludgrove.net

**PRIOR PARK COLLEGE**

**Where:** Bath  
**They say:** Our ethos is to care for our students so that they feel empowered to develop their talents [and] be rooted in the Christian values of consideration, compassion, kindness, service, contribution to others and an openness to God.

**Online:** priorparkcollege.com

and consider arranging for an overnight stay at the new school ahead of their child's start date.

She added: "Allow pupils to be part of the decision-making process and encourage them to connect with other pupils in the relevant year group."

Chris Russell is also an advocate of parents checking out the school. At DOYRMS, visitors are given a guided tour by a student of a similar age to their own child, allowing them to ask any questions they may have.

He continued: "Make arrangements and choose a new school as soon as you can so that the place is guaranteed."

"If parents haven't considered boarding, we encourage them to visit a state boarding school like The Duke of York's Royal Military School to see how it can offer extra-curricular activities and develop a well-rounded child."

Rory Johnson welcomes visitors to Hanford School and organises taster days – and nights – for would-be pupils.

"Make regular visits," he advised. "It is never too soon to make contact. All children starting any school benefit from experience of the school they are joining."

The need for honesty from adults about what their child's new

surroundings will be like is especially important according to St Lawrence College's Dale Spencer.

"Parents should involve their child in the selection of the school," he said. "Communication is an important element of successful boarding."

"Educating your child with the use of Skype and email is a good idea as pupils enjoy seeing a family face wherever they are in the world."

Strong communication is also encouraged by Haberdashers' Monmouth Schools. A spokesman explained: "Parents can discuss their plans as a family, including the children in any decisions. It is vitally important for children to understand the benefits of boarding and to feel it is a positive opportunity."

"They will grow in confidence and have a stable environment in which to develop academic, sporting and musical skills and to feel part of a community."

Chafyn Grove provides parents and pupils with information about daily routines and runs a taster day ahead of term, while the first weekend of the school year involves a fun-filled Saturday evening and a trip out on the Sunday.

Simon Barber, of Ludgrove School, acknowledged the adaptability of children from military

backgrounds when asked what Army families can do to prepare youngsters for starting a new school.

"In all honesty, the same as for any child," he said. "What is important is that the parents express to the child how confident they are that the child will be happy in the new school and will make lots of new friends and have plenty of new opportunities."

"It is so important that children feel that they have the full support of their families as that will give them their own confidence."

James Breeze, of Clifton College, believes that providing children with a reminder of home can be an effective tool.

"Some of our new pupils like to bring with them a selection of their favourite family photos," he said.

"They can make their dorm feel like home and it means they can also share the stories behind the photos with their friends in the house."

For Jo Sagers, registrar at Dauntsey's School, pupils should be encouraged to make the most of the extra-curricular opportunities presented to them.

"We urge parents to encourage their children to take full advantage of all the activities, clubs and societies on offer – from street dance to debating, archery to Arabic, tennis to triathlon; there's

something for everyone. "Getting involved helps to forge friendships and encourages a strong sense of community."

### CLEVER CHOICE

Despite the challenges that face pupils and parents who go down the boarding route, the combined experience of Britain's Forces-friendly schools ensures that a mobile military lifestyle does not have to negatively impact on a child's education.

From top-notch teaching to professional-quality facilities and finely-honed pastoral care, youngsters enjoy an enriching experience which perfectly prepares them for the future. ■



Pictures (clockwise from top left): Action from the cricket pitch at Haberdashers' Monmouth Schools; Tending to a horse at Hanford School; On the ball at The Wellington Academy; Leaping into the lead at Ludgrove School

#### QUEEN VICTORIA SCHOOL

**Where:** Dunblane, Scotland  
**They say:** If parents have a connection with Scotland or have served in a Scottish regiment, QVS is the right place to ensure stability of education, excellent pastoral care and support of the highest quality.

**Online:** qvs.org.uk

#### THE ROYAL ALEXANDRA AND ALBERT SCHOOL

**Where:** Reigate, Surrey  
**They say:** We have a long history of working alongside military families, with an experienced pastoral team, an active cadet unit and a welcoming population.

**Online:** raa-school.co.uk

#### ST LAWRENCE COLLEGE

**Where:** Ramsgate, Kent  
**They say:** We have excellent academic results, amazing facilities and outstanding extra-curricular activities, but we are small enough to be a happy and caring community.

**Online:** slcuk.com

#### THE WELLINGTON ACADEMY

**Where:** Tidworth, Wiltshire  
**They say:** We are vibrant, busy and forward-thinking. Students have opportunities to work with Wellington College students and staff and conduct exchanges with our schools in China.

**Online:** thewellingtonacademy.org.uk

#### WYCLIFFE

**Where:** Stonehouse, Gloucestershire  
**They say:** Wycliffe is an ideal destination for pupils who want all the advantages of a contemporary environment in a beautiful rural location. Wycliffe successfully blends the best of the traditional and modern.

**Online:** wycliffe.co.uk