**Interview Details**

**Project Title:** An exploration of service children with SEND’s experience of separation and deployment throughout education, from the perspective of service children, their families and school staff.

**Interview Date and Time:** 03/03/2025 16:00 – 14:30 (20 mins)

**Interview Location:** Online via Teams

**Interviewer:** (“I”)

**Interviewee:** Participant 4 (“P4”)

**Key:**

[*inaudible*] = inaudible word due to interference on the recording

**Interview Transcript**

I: So just to note that we obviously don’t have consent to talk about any specific children or names. So if you bare that in mind and try not to mention any names, because we obviously haven't got consent from parents to do that.

P4: Yeah, that's fine.

I: So if we start with just some demographics, so just to check what pronouns you'd like me to refer to you with while we're chatting.

P4: She her. That's fine, yeah.

I: Fab and your job role?

P4: Is class teacher.

I: Teacher. What year do you teach?

P4: Reception.

I: Oh, little ones. Lovely. I can imagine why your day was a bit hectic now. And do the children the children that were thinking about today that you support have an identified special educational need or disability?

P4: Yes.  
I: Thank you. And their parent is currently serving in the military? Or are they a veteran? Do you know?

P4: Currently serving.

I: Do you know which branch of the military they're in? As in Army, Navy, Royal Air Force?

P4: I'm not sure, I'm afraid no.

I: That's OK. Don't worry. Fab, let's get started then if you're ready.

P4: Yeah, absolutely.

I: So, thinking about service children with special educational needs that you support. Have those service children or that service child experienced separation because of their parent being in the military? Do you know?

P4: Yes, I do however, think that they are quite used to it. They've become quite robust with it and when parent goes away. There are some kind of telling signs, but like I said, I do think they've got used to it.

I: Because it's kind of like become a part of their everyday life.

P4: Yes, exactly.

I: And do you know when the when the parent is away, whether that's for deployment or training or whatever, that looks like, do you as a school, become aware of that? Or is it kind of you just kind of happen to find out? So like, are you informed as a school essentially is what I'm asking?

P4: We are informed to the school. I don't know how it works in terms of like with our pastoral lead, but I know that the child in my class his parents are very good at communicating it with us and they will let me know as class teacher and let the school know as well.

I: Mm hmm. And is that in advance of them going away?

P4: Yes. Yeah.

I: Yeah. OK. Fab. And I'm just wondering, I know you just said that they kind of they used to it and it's kind of like a part of their their everyday life. I'm wondering if you see any differences in the child? In the lead up to their parent going away, while the parent is away, or even when that parent has just returned?

P4: Yeah, so I I think he's definitely quieter when when parent is away. It doesn't massively affect him. He's definitely quieter within the mornings when he first comes in, and then he kinds of gets into his groove and he's ok. And I find when parent comes back, when he gets picked up by that parent, he's not as like he's a lot more like not as excited as as whether when his Nan or his other parent will pick him up. So yeah.

I: Yes. I wonder do you have any thoughts about why that might be?

P4: I wonder maybe because the relationship isn't as strong as what it is the with the family members that are here all the time, that bond isn't as as strong as it is with the other grown-ups in his life. So, I don't know, it's hard because it could be a bit of like, it's like that uncertainty, isn't it? Because there's no real structure to when they go away in the military and it could be that he's he's worried that he's going to go home with parent and then it's going to be really short lived and has to say goodbye again. And it's a minefield, isn't it? But yeah, I think something like that potentially because the relationship isn't as strong as as other grown-ups in his life.

I: Hmm. So they’re used to those are the parents that are the parent or the family members being around more consistently for him.

P4: Yeah, yeah.

I: You kind of started to touch on it there a little bit, but I'm wondering like whether you think their identified special educational need impacts on their, their experiences of their parent being in the military and experiencing those periods of separation? If at all.

P4: Umm, I don't think so because of the category of his his need. It's not. It's not really related to like emotion. So I don't think. I don't think it would link for him specifically. Umm., because its speech and language.

I: Language. OK.

P4: It's funny actually. I have my friend's husband is in the Marines and she they have a little boy who is really, really high SEN. So, when I'm talking to you about this, I'm thinking about the child in my class, and I'm also thinking about their child and it's like two completely different things. Like I just said to you, it's probably not affected his emotions because his speech and language isn't like connected to that. Whereas my friend's little boy, it would, it's like, emotions would be all up over the place. So it's really hard, isn't it? Because it's it's like that two different, two different like categories.

I: Yeah. See what you're describing there is the type of special educational need is going to be like an influencing factor on whether that impacts them more or less.

P4: Yeah. Then another child? Yeah.

I: Yeah. Which makes sense. Yeah. Thank you. These might be tricky questions to answer now, because what you've described is that he kind of just gets on with it. It's kind of the same and you don't see that much change in him, but I want to think about the impact in different areas, so first time thinking, we've kind of talked about this, but thinking about whether those experiences of separation and deployment impact on the child emotions, whether you notice any change or anything that's telling of that, or whether parents have kind of talked about things with you.

P4: I think for this little boy it is mainly the fact that he is just a little bit more quiet, especially when he comes in, he's a little bit more quiet, a little bit more reserved, more reluctant to start his morning job. But then once he gets in to and I guess it's because it's that separation, is it like he's at school now, he's not thinking about like those things at home. Whereas when he first comes in, he's just come from that environment. So it's probably because he's used to being, it's like it's so busy here and so noisy and gets wrapped up with friends and all that sort of thing that takes his mind off it, but he's definitely quieter.

I: So in that transition point, at the start of the day, that's when you kind of see some slight changes. But then as soon as he settled into the school day, that's it, it's kind of like it’s school now and home is separate, that's something else.

P4: Yeah.

I: And do you think there's been any impact on him in terms of learning or education? Do you see any changes when parents away?

P4: Umm. Yes. His concentration can become a bit more inconsistent during those times, like when we're on the carpet, we’re doing whatever input I'm doing, I will have to keep reminding him to look this way and make sure he's joining in and that sort of thing, and it does tend to be around those sorts of times. But in his actual learning, he's doing really, really well. So bigger picture wise, it's not having a massive impact. He’s not where he should be in terms of his learning, but it's not having a massive impact on his progress. But he does struggle with that concentration. I don't know whether it's because his mind is elsewhere. But it's just those times I have to keep bringing him back to it.

I: So, it's almost like in those times you have to do a little bit more just general support for him to kind of keep him with you during the day, yeah.

P4: Yeah.

I: And I want to think a little bit about kind of the support that helps these children during those times, kind of from different avenues. So first I'm wondering if you've noticed anything that they do for themselves that helps them, to like, manage and cope, when parent is away? There might not be anything. That's ok, but just just a wonder.

P4: He's a very. He's a very, like, tearful little boy, more so than most of the children in my class. If if he bumped his leg or bumped his head or something to an extent where another child would be like I'm ok, it would really upset him and he would have to come and seek attention from a grown up. So I don't know if that is his kind of way of of seeking that out because he's trying to get that attention. It's really tricky to to know, isn't it? Especially when they're so young, they don't really have like a I don't really have a way of regulating themselves yet, but maybe that maybe that is is to do with it.

I: And I wonder as well, because if I mean, I don't know what the speech and language need there is, but if they’ve got a difficulty with language, that could be a barrier as well. I imagine in communicating some of that.

P4: Yeah, he gets quite upset. Yeah, gets frustrated, but he has actually got really, really good with if he's struggling to pronounce a word, so for example, the word king, he'll say Ting he he gets his sounds mixed up, and if another child can't understand him, he'll come to me and he'll go and show me king, king and I can then help him. But yeah, he does get upset about it. It frustrates him.

I: Hmm. Thank you. It's really helpful to kind of get that kind of bigger picture as well. I'm wondering specifically about school support in terms of service children, and I know you said you've got one in your class, but I'm also thinking like more broadly around the school, whether there's things that you do to support your service children during times of separation and deployment?

P4: So we have a pastoral lead, who all of the communication about when parents go away and all that sort of thing goes to them and quite a lot of the time she will come down and she will take that child out, they'll do like a nice activity together, she'll have a chat with them, make sure they are ok in like her kind of job role aspect of it, and then bring them back afterwards. So it doesn't, to be honest with you, it doesn't happen a lot with the child in my class because he copes quite well, but I don't know the other children in in the school that are in the same situation, so it might be that they don't cope as well, and the pastoral lead is then needed a lot more for them. But that is what she does. She comes and she takes the children and she goes off and does some kind of, I don't know what activities is, but some kind of activity where they might do a drawing or something along those lines to help them express their feelings and that sort of thing. And we also have an emotional literacy support assistant. I don't know if any of the other children are under her. The child in my class is not, but it is something that can be offered to the children if they are experiencing any kind of issues with their emotions, which, if those other children are along that kind of line, then perhaps they are under her. But like I said, I don't know unfortunately, but those those things are there as support.

I: That's OK. Yes, it sounds like you have dedicated staff within the school that kind of pick up that role to support, if, if and when it's needed for those children. Is that right?

P4: Yeah, yeah.

I: And do you? I'm just wondering, as a school, do you have lots of service children or do you just have a few? Do you know?

P4: Just a few. I'm pretty sure it's only three. It's only three that have SEN, but the child in my class has older siblings in the school, so I don't know there might be a handful or quite a few more that are service children, but the SEN ones, I'm pretty sure there's only three of them.

I: And yeah. Yeah. OK. Thank you. Just helps me get better context for the school because some schools I've spoke to have loads of service children and quite a few with additional needs as well. But it's helpful to get that picture. Is there anything else that you think schools could be doing to support service children with additional needs during times of separation and deployment?

P4: It might, I mean, it's very hard because I don't know whether this is something that actually goes on within the school or not, but it it would be quite nice if perhaps in age groups rather than everyone at once, but to have some kind of like group that children can go to. Obviously, it wouldn't, it wouldn't fall into a time where when parents are all away at the same time because that's just never going to happen, but some kind of group that they can go to and children can share experiences and share feelings and share things that have supported them and helped them, so they can be a support for each other rather than just relying on the grown-ups, because it's all well and good us supporting them but we're not actually in their situation, so.

I: So some kind of peer support system.

P4: Yeah.

I: I'm wondering what it is helpful for schools to know if they've got service children with additional needs or if they've got a service child in their class? What is helpful for schools and staff to know to be able to support them most effectively, particularly when we're thinking about when they've got a parent going away and they're experiencing that separation?

P4: I would think, some kind of, or whatever works for that child at home in terms of regulation and then being able or us being able to help them regulate them, being able to support themselves, to regulate, whether that's having something like, I don't know, like a weighted blanket or whatever it might be that the parents have found works for the child so that we can have that in school, so that obviously when those times when the parents are away and things become more difficult for the child, there is that resource or somebody who knows how to support them in a specific way, that is that is specific to them and what will support them because children are all so different, aren't they? So it's it's really hard to, it's impossible to hit all the nails at the same time. So I think just understanding what supports them in those moments so that it can be ready at school for if they need it.

I: So having that communication with parents at home and sharing that information so that if it is a bit trickier when parents are away, schools know straight away, these are the things that we know help them at home. Let's draw on these and see if they help in school as well.

P4: Yeah.

I: Yeah. Ok. And do you think there's anything specific to them being service children with additional needs that would need to be, that schools need to have in mind?

P4: I guess the fact that not all families are going to be as great at communicating and it might be that you get a parent come to the door on the day of deployment and say, oh mum or dad has gone away today and then you're hit with this, like, oh my goodness. So it's more of like a, having that open line of communication and making sure that, especially teachers who are in the class because if the information goes to the pastoral leader and it's not passed on to the class teacher, then you're totally unprepared for when that child comes in and is maybe completely dysregulated. So I think having that line of communication with parents, whoever's leading it within the school and the child's class as well.

I: So yeah, so making sure everybody who's involved has the same information essentially?

P4: Yeah. And then in advance as well, like, I'm really lucky like I will always know, but I can imagine it's not like that for all families. So, so yeah, having having the information in advance so that you can prepare for it, you know it's coming. You know that perhaps you might need an extra person at the door to help the child come in that morning.

I: Yeah. So the communication there is kind of the key to be able to effectively support any service child during that. Thank you.

P4: Yeah.

I: Is there anything else that I haven't asked about when we're thinking about service children with additional needs and separation and deployment that you think would be helpful for me to know or to think about?

P4: I'm thinking now more in terms of my friend because I know that when her husband goes away, she really struggles because her little boys SEN is so, so high, she really struggles with just like the life at home. And I guess that he's so a little bit more context, he has just got a place in a special school, so she she had to fight the courts and everything. So he missed school from September up until Christmas because he had turned. He was turning 5 in January, so he should have been at school, but she said no. I'm going to fight the courts and try and get him into special education. And she won. And now he's in special school, but that that time before. And I think if he'd gone to a state school, if he'd gone to a state school. It would have been her worry at home. I know for a fact that she would have constantly been worried about him being in a setting that's not suitable for him. So for those children with that higher level of SEN and parents that are going away and disrupting their routine, their normal life, maybe schools being more more involved with the parent and the other parent that's left at home and how they're doing, rather than being super, super focused on that child because at the end of the day that child's going back to that home. And if that that parent isn't coping, then that's going to come back on school and impact that. So I don't know, maybe something like that.

I: Thinking about the bigger the wider family and not just the individual child, thinking about how can schools support the parent as well during those times and make life a little bit easier.

P4: Yeah.

I: Yeah, because I imagine from what you're saying there, during that time, school stays the same, but at home everything's different. And then there's just one parent at home managing those things.

P4: Yeah.

I: Yeah. Thank you. That's helpful. And helpful to think about two contexts I guess.

P4: Yeah.