

# Service Children In State Schools National Executive Advisory Committee



**The Voice of Schools  
Supporting Service Children in England**

**Voice of Schools SEND Survey Report  
April 2024**



## Supporting Service Children with SEND:

*Voice of Schools Consultation Findings*

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

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## Executive Summary

### Background

- Service Children in State Schools (SCISS) is a voluntary affiliated network of state-maintained schools in England that have any number of Service children on roll. SCISS defines a Service child as a person whose parent, or carer, serves in the regular Armed Forces or as a reservist, or has done at any point during the first 25 years of that person's life.
- SCISS aims to enhance the education and welfare of Service children, working with key partners and affiliated schools to achieve the best possible outcomes for this group of children and young people.
- SCISS is led by a National Executive Advisory Committee (NEAC). The core purpose of the SCISS NEAC is to be the 'Voice of Schools' supporting Service children. This involves engaging with policy makers, and identifying effective practice to share with the SCISS network of schools.
- The SCISS NEAC previously commissioned a consultation with schools who have Service children on roll, with findings published in the *Voice of Schools Survey Report* (March 2021). This identified significant challenges in relation to Service children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This follow-up consultation was commissioned to develop a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities identified by schools in their work with Service children with SEND.

### Data Collection and Analysis

- The consultation was undertaken using an online questionnaire consisting of Likert-type rating scales and free text response questions. A total of 299 responses containing usable data were received.
- Data was analysed both as a complete set, and by looking at differences between key subgroups: school type; main Service of a school's Service child cohort; number of Service children on roll.
- The proportion of responses received from schools in each subgroup were broadly in line with those in the overall population of Service children in England. Approximately three-quarters of responses were from a headteacher (50%) or other senior leader (22%), indicating the significance of this issue to schools. A further 16% of respondents had a lead welfare or support role in their school.

### Supporting Service Children with SEND

- Three-quarters of respondents were of the view that support needs of Service children with SEND were comparable to the support needs of other pupils with SEND. Some respondents, in particular from schools with larger cohorts, identified three key areas of need specific to Service children with SEND:
  - *Emotional Impacts of Service Life*- more frequent co-occurring social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) among Service children with SEND than with other pupils with SEND;
  - *Impact of Mobility*- family relocation following a parent's posting presents a barrier to fully identifying the needs of Service children with SEND, and possibly exacerbates SEND needs, in particular with communication, language, social interaction, and attachment;
  - *A Need for Tailored Support*- some respondents identified a need for support for Service children with SEND to be informed by the possible impacts of Service life in order to provide the most effective support.
- Around two-thirds of respondents with experience of Service children with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) were of the view that communication with their local authority regarding support needs of Service children with SEND was comparable to that regarding other pupils with SEND. However, schools with larger Service child cohorts and/or British Army cohorts were more likely to report greater communication challenges regarding support for Service children with an EHCP than for other pupils with an EHCP. Mobility is likely to be a key factor in these greater challenges.
- Examples of things that are going well for Service children with SEND included tailored in-school support, Service-child specific support, and strong relationships with parents and partner agencies.
- Schools typically rely on internal resources to provide tailored support for Service children with SEND. Local authorities and/or academy chains were viewed as a major source of support by just 12% of respondents, with just 7% noting major support from one or more organisations or services from other sources such as the MOD Education and Advisory team, local Armed Forces units, and charities.

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## **Transition**

- Moving between different schools can be challenging for all pupils, but is widely recognised to be particularly challenging for pupils with SEND. Some Service children experience a high frequency of transition, in particular related to family mobility linked to the serving parent's posting. British Army families are typically the most mobile, with RAF families generally experiencing less mobility and Royal Navy families typically the least mobile.
- Respondents indicated that transitions within local authority areas generally work reasonably well. However, greater challenges were reported for moves between areas, with 30% disagreeing and 12% strongly disagreeing that the transition process for Service children with SEND from a different local authority area in England is typically smooth. For those with experience of a Service child with SEND arriving from another country, 30% disagreed and 24% strongly disagreed that the transition process had been smooth.
- A Service Children's Assessment of Need (SCAN) is an assessment of the SEN needs of a Service child in an overseas MOD Defence Children Services (DCS) school. Statutory guidance states that local authorities should utilise a SCAN when designing provision for Service children with SEND arriving from overseas. Only 16 respondents had experience of a Service child arriving with a SCAN. Although SCANS were viewed as potentially useful, the majority of our small sample indicated that their local authority did not recognise or make use of the SCAN document.

## **Desired Changes**

Respondents were asked what single change would most improve the effectiveness of support provided to Service children with SEND. In many cases, suggestions related to resources and processes for SEND pupils in general, though specific Service-child focussed changes were also identified:

- *A More Cohesive Transition Process*- an improved process for transition between schools, made possible by timely transfer of information, greater consistency in processes between areas, greater recognition by receiving local authorities and other agencies of completed assessments and existing support plans, and greater adherence to the statutory guidance of the Armed Forces Covenant.
- *Additional Funding*- the majority of respondents indicated that their local authority's resources for SEND support was, at best, stretched and often inadequate. It was also noted that Service Pupil Premium was insufficient in isolation to fund adequate SEND support.
- *Service-Focussed Support*- around 1 in 12 respondents suggested potential benefits to be gained from raising awareness of the specific experiences and needs of Service children, and having greater access to support that is responsive to these needs and experiences.
- *Improved Communication*- some respondents suggested a need for improved communication with the local authority, other providers, and the family's wider network.
- *Wellbeing Support for Pupils and Families*- 1 in 20 respondents noted a need for wellbeing support that is informed by the particular experiences of Service children, and wellbeing support for families.
- *More Timely Referral Processing*- some respondents suggested a need for shorter wait times for assessments and support.

## **Key Messages for Stakeholders**

- *Local Armed Forces Units*- some respondents noted strong relationships with their local units, with links to senior officers, welfare teams and chaplains highly valued where these were present. Almost a quarter of respondents expressed a desire for improved communication with local Armed Forces units, in particular welfare teams. Schools with smaller cohorts of Service children expressed particular frustration with a lack of engagement from their local units.
- *Local Authorities*- a small number of respondents praised their local authority for good communication, with processes such as a named caseworker or specific contact for Service children with SEND particularly welcome where present. Around 1 in 5 respondents expressed the opinion that local authority SEND practitioners lacked understanding of the particular needs of Service children and/or that local authority processes were inflexible and unresponsive to these needs, placing Service children with SEND at a structural disadvantage.

- *National Structures and Policies*- respondents identified four key areas for improvement:
  - *A Consistent Approach*- consistent processes and/or greater portability of assessments;
  - *Improved Evidence Base and Guidance*- research to understand the specific experiences and impacts for Service children with SEND, and/or improved information and resources;
  - *Financial Sustainability*- increased resources from central Government for SEND support;
  - *Earlier Intervention*- providing support before needs escalate.

## Conclusions

- Service children with SEND are not a homogenous cohort. Key variations in the experiences and views of schools with Service children with SEND on roll were observed in subgroups based on the number of Service children on roll, and on the main Service represented within the school's Service child cohort. Schools with British Army cohorts were more likely to report disproportionate challenges, relative to other pupils with SEND, with accessing SEN support and agreeing EHCPs for their Service children than were schools with mainly RAF cohorts, which in turn were more likely to report challenges than schools with mainly Royal Navy/ Royal Marines cohorts.
- There is strong evidence to suggest that mobility risks creating a specific and significant disadvantage for Service children with SEND. This is predominantly as a result of delayed assessments of needs, how agencies manage waiting lists, and/or discontinuity of support provided due to delayed or incomplete transfer of information, variable availability of support in different areas, and/or the absence of processes to provide access to equivalent support without further assessments.
- Service children with SEND may have distinctive needs based on their experiences of Service life, most commonly co-occurring Emotional or Mental Health needs and co-occurring Attachment or Social Interaction needs. Practitioners should be aware of and responsive to this elevated risk.
- A majority of respondents expressed the view that the awareness and understanding of local authority SEND practitioners and NHS staff regarding Service children appears to be low overall. Despite the majority of respondents being from areas with high numbers of Service children, most reported a poor awareness among local agencies of the particular disadvantages and challenges experienced by Service children, a lack of flexibility to ensure equitable access to support, and low adherence to the Armed Forces Covenant. The experience of the majority of respondents to this questionnaire suggests that the current systems, practice and culture of many local authority SEND practitioners and NHS providers are a significant barrier to equity being achieved.
- It is clear that SEND services in general are under considerable pressure. It is important to recognise that for strategies and priorities to improve the experiences of Service children with SEND to be effective, they must take account of the wider context of SEND services, and the challenges they face.
- Despite the focus of many respondents on the gaps and challenges experienced when supporting Service children with SEND, it is important to note things are going well for some Service children with SEND. Typically this is linked to schools using funds and other resources over and above Service Pupil Premium allocations to provide targeted support for these children.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggestions for further work to explore the main findings in more depth, and identify practicable responses to the main conclusions:

- Developing Processes and Resources to Ease Transition;
- Promoting Awareness and Monitoring the Impact of the Armed Forces Covenant;
- Enabling More Consistent Positive Communication with Armed Forces Units;
- Guidance for Linking SEND Support and Pastoral Support for Service Children;
- Training to Raise Awareness of the Specific Needs of Service Children with SEND, tailored for:
  - School staff in those schools with low numbers of Service children;
  - Local authority SEND practitioners;
  - Providers of health, family wellbeing and SEND support services;
  - Welfare officers from the MOD.

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# Section 1 – Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Service Children in State Schools (SCISS) is a voluntary affiliated network of state-maintained schools in England that have any number of Service children on roll. SCISS defines a Service child as: “A person whose parent, or carer, serves in the regular Armed Forces or as a reservist, or has done at any point during the first 25 years of that person’s life”.<sup>1</sup> This definition is broader than that used for eligibility for Service Pupil Premium, and is used to highlight the lifetime experience of a Service child in order to maximise attainment and provide optimum pastoral support. SCISS aims to enhance the education and welfare of Service children, working with key partners and affiliated schools to achieve the best possible outcomes for this group of children and young people.

SCISS is led by a National Executive Advisory Committee (NEAC) comprising of: headteachers and senior school leaders; representatives from the three Armed Forces Families Federations; independent advisors and senior representatives from the Department for Education (DfE), the Ministry of Defence’s Education Policy Team, and the Service Children’s Progression Alliance (SCiP). The core purpose of the SCISS NEAC is to be the ‘Voice of Schools’ supporting Service children. This involves engaging with policy makers, and identifying effective practice to share with the SCISS network of schools.

The SCISS NEAC previously commissioned a consultation with schools who have Service children on roll, part of which sought to identify experiences of schools in relation to support for Service children. Published in March 2021, the *Voice of Schools Survey Report*<sup>2</sup> identified significant challenges in relation to identifying the needs of, and securing appropriate support for, Service children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The SCISS NEAC resolved to explore this issue in more depth in order to provide evidence-based responses at a national level to partners and policy makers, on behalf of schools.

## 1.2 This Report

The SCISS NEAC commissioned Tiller Research Ltd to undertake a consultation with schools who have Service children on roll. The purpose of the consultation was to develop a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities identified by schools in their work with Service children with SEND, aiming to identify common issues as well as celebrating success in order to promote and extend effective practice. The key lines of enquiry were:

- To identify school experiences of supporting Service children with SEND, and how these are similar or different to experiences of supporting other pupils SEND;
- To identify what is currently going well for Service children with SEND, and what changes schools believe would most improve the effectiveness of support;
- To identify how stakeholders (e.g. government departments and local authorities), could support schools to optimise the quality of support they provide to Service children with SEND.

This report presents the consultation findings, based on nearly 300 responses from headteachers, senior school leaders, and school leads for supporting Service children and/or children with SEND.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sciss.org.uk/what-is-sciss/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sciss.org.uk/voice-of-schools-project/>

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### 1.3 Data Collection

The consultation was undertaken using an online questionnaire consisting of Likert-type rating scales and free text response questions. The questionnaire was promoted through the SCISS network via email and social media channels. Partner organisations supported promotion of the questionnaire to schools that are not part of the SCISS network.

A total of 354 questionnaire responses were received. Of these, 299 contained usable data, with 249 providing a response to all of the quantitative questions.

### 1.4 Data Analysis

#### ***Quantitative Data***

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

- Full set of responses (N=299);
- Responses by school type (primary, secondary, special);
- Responses by main Service of Service child cohort;
- Responses by number of Service children on roll.

All quantitative questions received a significant proportion of respondents selecting 'N/A' to indicate that they did not have experience relevant to the question, for example schools with non-mobile cohorts in response to questions about transition, or schools with small cohorts of Service children who may not have ever had a Service child with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) on roll. In order to maintain a focus on relevant experiences and provide easier comparison between subgroups, the analysis presented in this report refers to percentages of respondent/ subgroup samples excluding 'N/A's, unless otherwise stated. Full response breakdowns including N/As are provided in Appendix A.

#### ***Qualitative Data***

A content analysis technique was used to identify the number of responses that related to each issue raised in the free text data. Reported percentages are based on a sample of 299.

### 1.5 Profile of Questionnaire Respondents

The analysed sample contains the 299 responses that included usable data, meaning that a response was received to at least the first set of seven quantitative questions. A total of 55 other responses were either duplicate responses or responses that only provided profile information, and so were excluded. No substantive data was excluded.

Of the 299 analysed responses, 11 (4%) do not currently have any Service children on roll and 96 (32%) do not currently have any Service children with SEND on roll. These responses have been included in the analysis as they enable a more complete overall picture to be provided. In addition, many of these respondents provided insight based on previous experience of supporting Service children with SEND at their school.

#### 1.5.1 School Type

The majority of responses were received from primary schools, with just under 1 in 7 responses from secondary schools (fig 1). This is broadly in line with the overall proportions of state schools in England (primary- 78%, secondary- 16%, special- 6%)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>

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### 1.5.2 Service

Subgroups were created based on the Armed Forces Service in which the parents of the majority of a school's Service child cohort are serving or have served (fig 2).

Just under half of the responses received were from schools with a Service child cohort linked mostly to one Service. Of these, 57% were from schools where the majority of Service children had a parent serving in the British Army, 27% RAF and 16% Royal Navy/Royal Marines. This is broadly in line with the overall proportions of current UK Forces personnel (Army- 60%, RAF- 19%, Royal Navy/Royal Marines- 20%)<sup>4</sup>.

Schools with fewer than four Service children (n=101) were grouped together, regardless of which Service(s) are represented within their Service child cohort. This is because analysis indicated that their low number of Service children was of more relevance than their specific Armed Forces Service for understanding their experience.

### 1.5.3 Number of Service Children on Roll

Schools were asked to provide their approximate number of Service children on roll at 5th October 2023, the most recent school census date. Four in ten responses were from schools with fewer than five Service children on roll (fig 3). Data from the National Pupil Database shows that 50% of schools with Service children have only one or two on roll<sup>5</sup>, suggesting that a sample with a large proportion of responses from schools with low numbers of Service children is consistent with the overall population in England.

### 1.5.4 Local Authority Service Pupil Premium Quintile

The majority of responses were received from schools in local authority areas with high numbers of Service Pupil Premium recipients (fig 4). Nationally, the 20% of local authority areas with the highest number of Service children (Quintile 5) account for 75% of the overall population of Service children<sup>6</sup>. This group made up 86% of the respondent sample. Schools in quintiles 1-3 make up 10% of the Service child population nationally, but just 4% of our sample.

Overall, our sample is skewed somewhat towards those local authority areas with the highest number of Service children. However, as the issues discussed are most relevant to these areas, this is not considered to be a significant weakness.

Sub-group analysis of responses by SPP quintile has not been undertaken, as the relative sub-group sample sizes are not conducive to meaningful comparisons.

### 1.5.5 Service Children with SEND

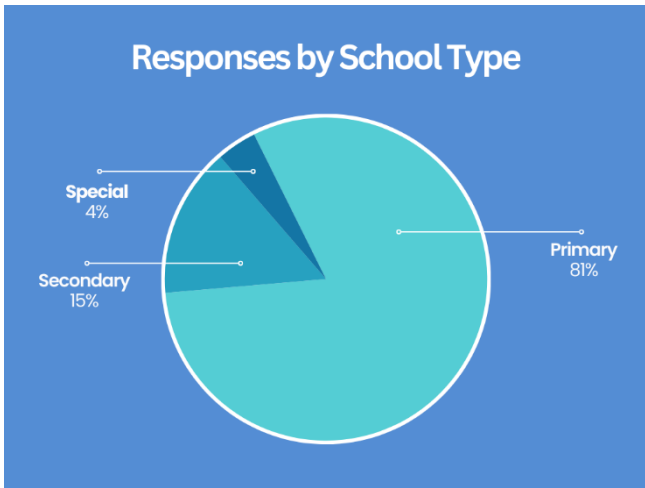
Schools were asked to provide their approximate number of Service children with SEND on roll at the most recent school census date. A quarter of respondents had five or more Service children with SEND on roll (fig 5), with 9% having 20 or more. The majority of respondents had only small current numbers of Service children with SEND on roll, with 39% having between 1 and 4, and 32% having no Service children with SEND currently on roll.

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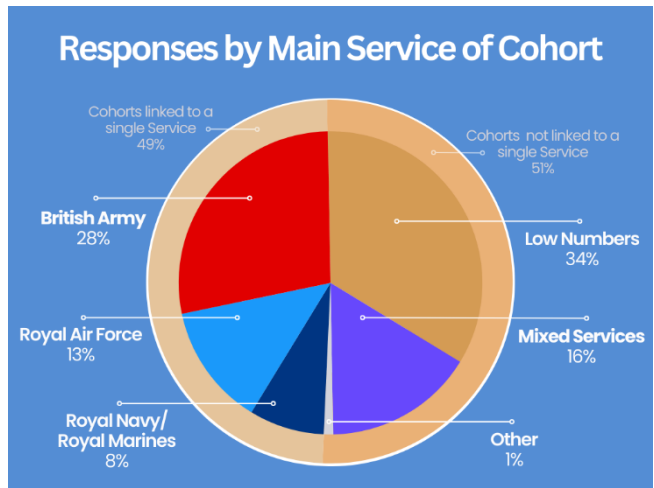
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/quarterly-service-personnel-statistics-2023/quarterly-service-personnel-statistics-1-october-2023>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.scipalliance.org/assets/files/SCP-Alliance-data-Briefing-FINAL-ONLINE.pdf>

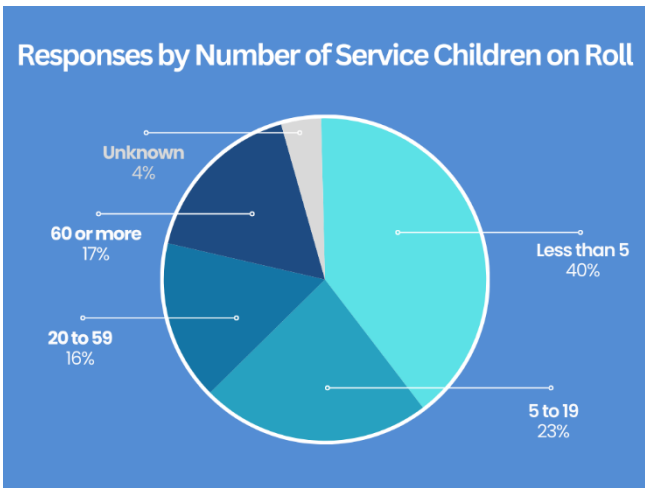
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.scipalliance.org/map>



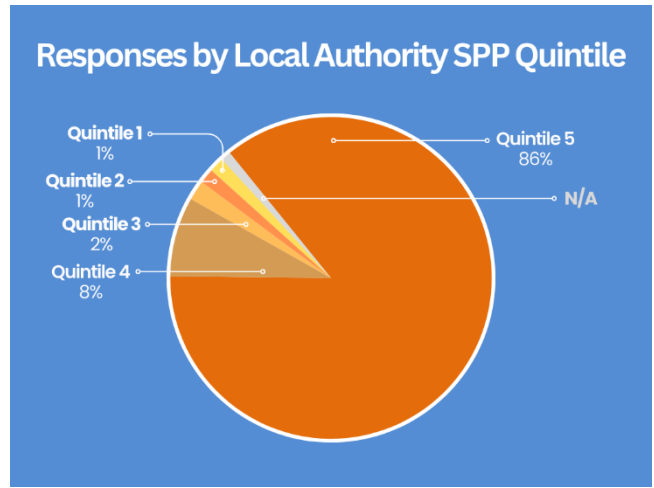
**Figure 1:** Responses received by school type. 'Primary' includes 'nursery', 'infant', 'first', 'junior' and 'middle deemed primary' schools. 'Secondary' includes 'middle deemed secondary', 'high' and 'all-through' schools



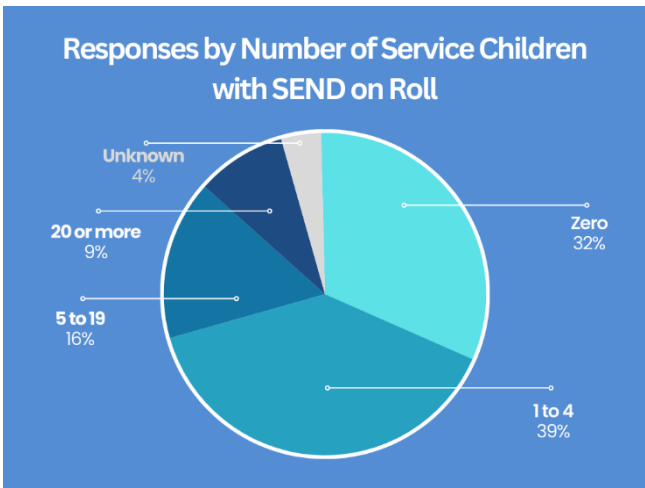
**Figure 2:** Responses received by main Service of the school's Service child cohort. 'Low numbers' are schools with <4 Service children on roll. 'Mixed Services' are schools with a moderate proportion of Service children from two or more Services



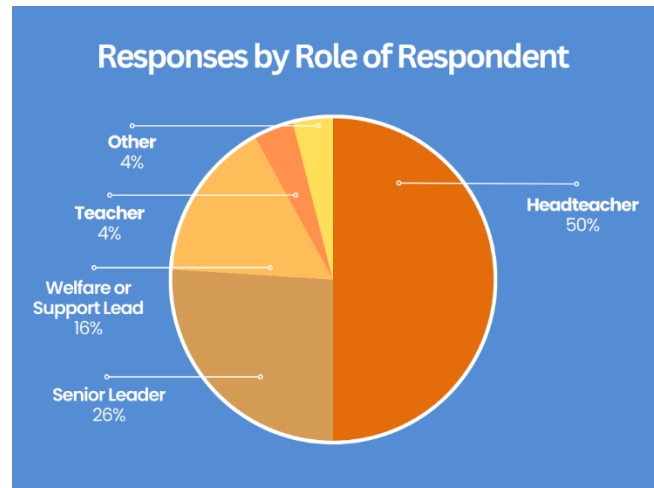
**Figure 3:** Responses received by number of Service children on roll at the responding school



**Figure 4:** Responses received by local authority quintile for number of pupils in receipt of Service Pupil Premium. Q5 areas have the highest number of SPP recipients. Overseas schools are not included in SPP data sets and so are marked 'N/A'



**Figure 5:** Responses received by number of Service children with SEND on roll at the responding school



**Figure 6:** Breakdown of respondents by role

### 1.5.6 Role of Respondent

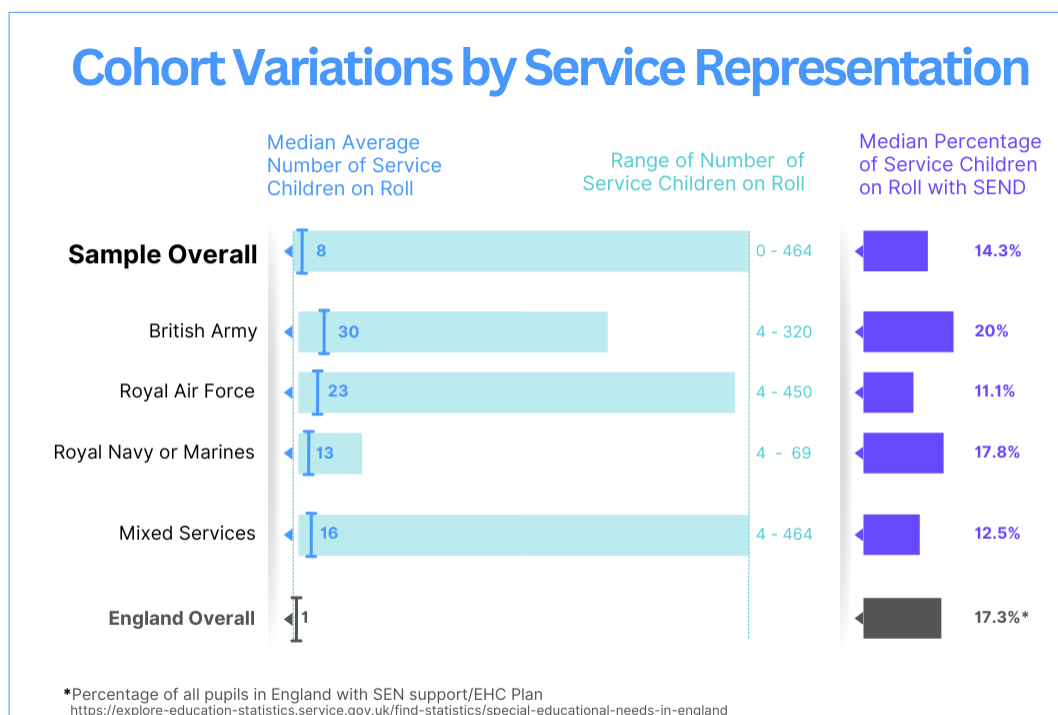
Approximately three-quarters of respondents were a Headteacher (50%) or a Senior Leader (26%), indicating the significance of this issue to schools. A further 16% had a lead welfare or support role in their school (fig 6). This includes both teaching and non-teaching staff with a specific pastoral, Service child welfare, and/or SEN Co-ordinator (SENCo) role. The remaining respondents were teachers (4%) and others such as administrative staff and school governors.

### 1.5.7 Interaction of Variables

It is important to recognise that Service children are a diverse group, as are the schools in England with Service children on roll. Characteristics of different Services are likely relevant when considering the needs of Service children with SEND, such as typically higher levels of mobility in the British Army than in other Services, or the relatively larger proportion of serving Royal Navy families who live in civilian communities. These characteristics are likely to interact with other variables such as the number of Service children on roll; for example schools with the largest proportion of Service children are more likely to have British Army or Royal Air Force cohorts than Royal Navy cohorts.

Figure 7 illustrates how the number of Service children on roll and the proportion of Service children with SEND varies based on the main Service of the cohort. This variation should be considered when interpreting patterns in the survey responses.

The median average of the percentage of Service children on roll with SEND in our sample was 14.3%, with subgroups varying between averages of 11% and 20%. For context, 17.3% of all pupils in England were recorded in June 2023 as having SEN support or an EHCP<sup>7</sup>, although this figure is not directly comparable.



**Figure 7:** Multivariate breakdown of sample, showing comparison of Service child cohorts and percentage of Service children with recognised SEND needs by main Service of cohort

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england>

## Section 2 – Supporting Service Children with SEND

### 2.1 Defining Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)

The Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care have a shared code of practice for the special educational needs and disability (SEND) system for children and young people aged 0 to 25. This provides the following definitions, which were used throughout this consultation:<sup>8</sup>

*A child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her. A child of compulsory school age or a young person has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she:*

- *has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or*
- *has a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions...*

*Many children and young people who have SEN may have a disability under the Equality Act 2010 – that is ‘...a physical or mental impairment which has a long-term and substantial adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities’.<sup>9</sup>*

### 2.2 Understanding Support Needs

Three-quarters of respondents were of the view that the support needs of Service children with SEND were comparable to the support needs of other pupils with SEND, with 48% agreeing and 26% strongly agreeing with the statement ‘*As a cohort, the support needs of my school’s Service pupils with SEND are broadly similar to those of other pupils with SEND*’.

However, schools with larger cohorts of Service children were more likely to disagree with this statement (fig 8). A third of respondents from schools with 60 or more Service children disagreed (20%) or strongly disagreed (14%) with this statement, as did a quarter of those with between 20 and 59 Service children (26%). Disagreement was highest among those schools with a British Army cohort, with 31% either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, compared with 19% RAF and 17% Royal Navy or Royal Marines. Figure 7 shows that schools with predominantly British Army cohorts on average have larger Service child cohorts, so the observed differences may be linked to cohort size, Service representation, or a combination of the two.

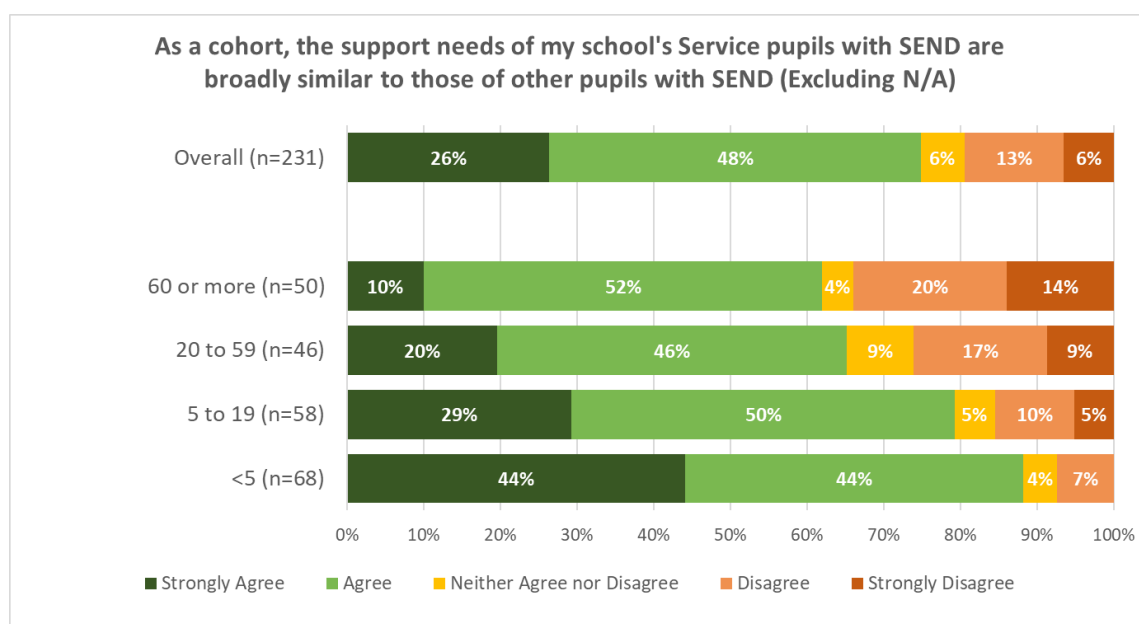
#### **Examples of needs specific to Service children**

When asked to provide examples of SEND needs of Service children that are different to the needs of other SEND pupils, 77% of respondents either provided no response or stated that there were no differences in SEND needs between the two groups. However, a significant minority of respondents identified specific needs in three key areas:

- **Emotional Impacts of Service Life (9%)**  
Just under 1 in 10 respondents identified a higher level of social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) among their Service children with SEND than with other pupils with SEND. Attachment issues and other emotional needs linked to parents

<sup>8</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7dcb85ed915d2ac884d995/SEND\\_Code\\_of\\_Practice\\_January\\_2015.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7dcb85ed915d2ac884d995/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf) p15

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010>



**Figure 8:** Comparison of the support needs of Service children with SEND and those of other pupils with SEND, with subgroups based on the number of Service children on roll

being absent for long periods were often mentioned, as was the stress of the military lifestyle leading to behavioural issues, and the emotional impact of mobility. Co-occurring SEMH and SEND needs were not viewed as being unique to Service children, though some respondents viewed certain details of Service children’s experiences to be quite distinctive, meaning the characteristics of their needs were often quite different from those of other SEND pupils.

- **Impact of Mobility (5%)**

Mobility refers to Service children moving between schools, typically as a result of family relocation following a parent’s posting. Patterns of posting vary between and within Services, e.g. mobility is common for British Army families, but much less so for Royal Navy families. Mobility presents a barrier to fully identifying the needs of Service children with SEND, and this impact is explored in section 3.3. In addition to these challenges, around 1 in 20 respondents identified mobility as a possible exacerbating factor creating additional needs, in particular with communication, language, social interaction, and attachment.

- **A Need for Tailored Support (5%)**

Around 1 in 20 respondents identified a need for support for Service children with SEND to recognise the impact of Service life. Although arguably not a difference in needs as such, this does require a different approach to meeting the needs of Service children. Two key areas were identified:

- For SEMH support and counselling to have a strong awareness of Service life;
- Tailoring support involving the family to recognise and accommodate key features of Service life, such as periodic parental absence.

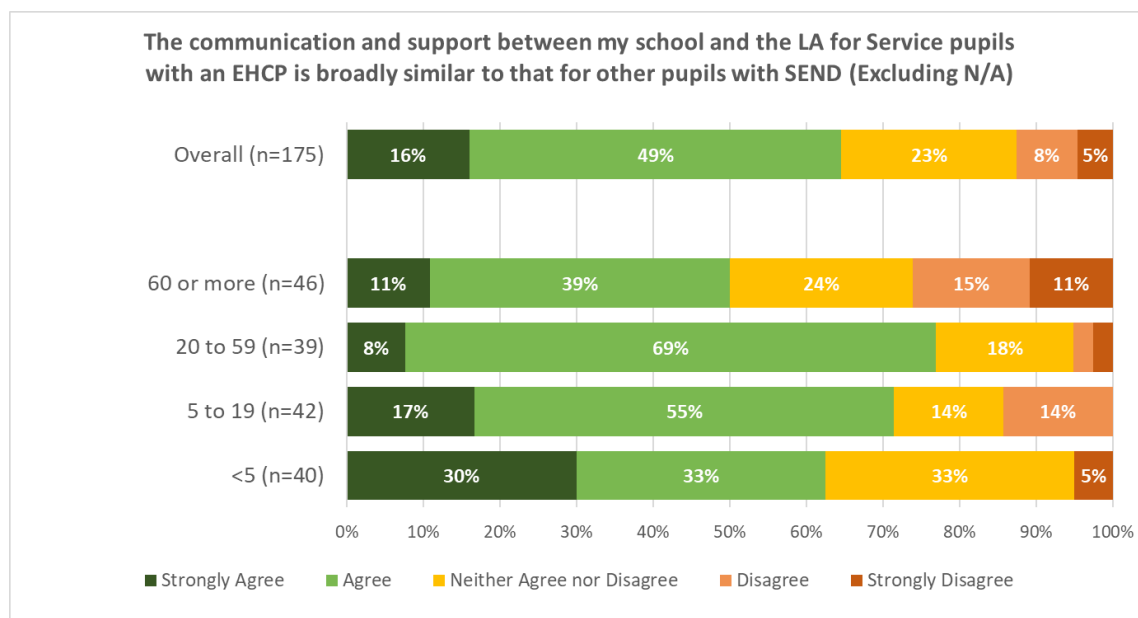
Whilst a small number of respondents, in particular those from schools with very small Service child cohorts, expressed the opinion that considering impacts of Service life was no different to considering the impact of the family circumstances of any other pupil with SEND, a far greater number emphasised a need for a high level of awareness of the possible impacts of Service life in order to provide the most effective support to Service children with SEND.

## 2.3 Communication with Local Authorities

Around two-thirds of respondents with experience of Service children with an EHCP were of the view that communication with their local authority regarding support needs of Service children with SEND was comparable to that regarding other pupils with SEND, with 49% agreeing and 16% strongly agreeing with the statement ‘*The communication and support between my school and the LA for Service pupils with an EHCP is broadly similar to that for other pupils with SEND*’ (fig 9).

Schools with larger Service child cohorts were more likely to disagree with this statement, with around a quarter of schools with 60 or more Service children on roll either disagreeing (15%) or strongly disagreeing (11%) with this statement, compared with just 5% of schools with fewer than five Service children on roll. This is likely to be explained in part by schools with larger cohorts being more likely to have experience of complex cases. Two-thirds of schools with fewer than five Service children had no experience of a Service child with an EHCP (67%), compared with just 10% of schools with a cohort of 60 or more.

Differences were observed based on the main Service of the cohort. For schools with a mainly British Army cohort, 80% had experience of a Service child with an EHCP, compared with 67% for schools with a mainly Royal Air Force or Royal Navy/ Royal Marines cohort. Of those schools with this experience, just over half of schools with a mainly British Army cohort agreed or strongly agreed that communication with the local authority was broadly similar to that for other pupils with SEND (57%), compared with three-quarters with RAF (73%) or Royal Navy/ Royal Marines (75%) cohorts. However, disagreement was higher among schools with a mainly RAF cohort (20%) compared with those with Royal Navy/ Royal Marines cohort (6%). Mobility is likely to be a key factor in these differences, with British Army families generally the most mobile and Royal Navy families the least mobile.



**Figure 9:** Comparison of the communication between schools and local authorities regarding support for Service children with an EHCP and those of other pupils with SEND, with subgroups based on the number of Service children on roll

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## **Universal Challenges**

It is worth noting that this question focussed on comparing levels of communication and support from Local Authorities regarding Service children with SEND with the communication and support from the same organisations regarding other pupils with SEND. Many free response comments suggested that in some local authority areas, support for all pupils with SEND and EHCPs struggled to meet demand. Typical comments included:

*“Communication and support from LA is the same though extremely poor with waiting for diagnosis being up to 18 months.”*

*“Accessing support for children with SEND is challenging, regardless of whether they are Service pupils.”*

*“Although I believe that the SEND system is completely broken [...], I have great concerns about the numbers of Service pupils with an EHCP being sent to us, despite our appeals that we are not able to meet need.”*

Schools with lower numbers of Service children were more likely to suggest that challenges experienced in relation to communication and support regarding Service children with EHCPs were equivalent to challenges for all pupils with SEND. Schools with higher numbers of Service children often noted specific challenges for those with SEND, typically related to mobility linked to the serving parent’s role.

Most local authorities in England are reported to have overspent their SEND budgets<sup>10</sup>, with some reported to be experiencing acute resource shortfalls. It is outside the scope of this report to explore the wider experiences of supporting children with SEND, but it is worth noting that even where support for Service children with SEND is viewed as of an equivalent standard to that for other pupils with SEND, this may not mean that the support provided is sufficient to meet the Service child’s needs.

There is not a consistent picture across the country: some respondents spoke highly of their local authority, and two indicated that Service children received preferential access to support, creating disadvantage for other pupils. Others noted that ostensibly equal access to support represents a structural disadvantage that is not unique to Service children, but is more likely to affect them. For example, long, inflexible assessment timeframes typically do not allow support plans to be prepared for mobile cohorts before they move. Respondents identified some non-Service child populations that experience mobility, but this was much less common than for Service children. Where mobility was experienced by non-Service children, it typically involved a single child at a time, whereas Service child mobility is often as a group. This introduces additional challenges to ensuring a smooth transition for Service children with SEND compared to those experienced by other SEND pupils.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/jan/13/uk-council-bournemouth-christchurch-poole-could-go-bust-due-to-60m-hole-in-special-needs-spending>

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## 2.4 Going Well

Respondents were asked ‘*What is currently going well for your Service pupils with SEND?*’. The key themes identified were:

- **In-School Support (20%)**

A significant number of schools were confident in the quality of support they were providing to Service children with SEND. This typically included:

- Individual, personalised support plans;
- Dedicated time from specialist staff, such as a SENCo, Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA), pastoral support;
- Tailored interventions.

Typically, this support was provided from a SEND perspective rather than a Service child perspective, with confirmation that Service children with SEND were able to access support on an equal basis to other pupils. Schools with larger Service child cohorts would be more likely to have at least one identified member of staff as a specific contact for Service children. This would typically be someone with personal experience of Service life.

- **Service-Child Specific Support (13%)**

Around 1 in 8 schools reported specific support for Service children with SEND. This was often activities and support available to all Service children that were made accessible to those with SEND. These included peer support groups, and support packages relating to deployment, mobility or other aspects of Service life. A small proportion (4%) noted communication with Service welfare teams that enabled responsive support to specific circumstances for Service families, such as additional support for families with a child with SEND during a serving parent’s absence.

- **Relationships with Parents (12%)**

Around 1 in 8 schools noted clear communication with parents and close working with the family as a key aspect of what was going well for their Service children with SEND. Some schools reported having regular informal contact with parents of Service children with SEND, either one-to-one or with events such as coffee mornings, as a means of building strong and trusting relationships. Others noted a focus on engaging parents with specific activities or learning opportunities, though for practical reasons these were typically focussed on non-serving parents.

- **Integrated and Settled (12%)**

Around 1 in 8 respondents noted the importance of integration and stability as enabling their Service children with SEND to thrive. This included having a consistent member of staff as a key contact, and being included in a range of activities. Pupils from non-mobile families integrated with local non-Service communities were often reported to be more settled and benefitting from a wider support network.

- **Partnering (8%)**

Around 1 in 12 respondents highlighted partnerships with external agencies as providing effective support for their Service children with SEND. This included working with specialist providers to deliver specific tailored support, usually sessions within the school setting but sometimes including regular sessions at an alternative provision or specialist setting. Access to such support, and available budget, appeared to vary considerably between areas, but was viewed as providing effective support wherever it was available.

## 2.5 Resources

Respondents were asked to identify the resources their school draws upon to provide tailored support to Service children with SEND. Major sources of reported support were predominantly from internal sources (fig 10). Of those respondents reporting major sources of support, 75% only identified major support from general staff training and/or internal specialist support staff, rising to 93% when staff and/or resources from a local authority or academy chain were included.

General staff training was the most significant source of support reported, with 79% of respondents reporting this as a major or moderate source of support, closely followed by internal specialist support staff (73%). These were typically SEND specialists, though in schools with larger Service child cohorts these were sometimes roles focussed on the welfare of Service children. Two schools reported having a member of staff who was both a SEND specialist and had a Service child welfare role.

Staff and/or resources from a local authority and/or academy chain was noted as a major source of support for 12% of respondents, with an additional 31% identifying moderate support from their local authority or academy chain. Reported support from other sources was typically only viewed as a minor source of support and was only accessed by a minority of respondents, with respondents reporting support from the MOD's Education Advisory Team (formerly CEAS) (18%), local Armed Forces units (34%), local and national charities (29%), and private businesses (13%).

Just 7% of respondents identified receiving major support for work with Service children with SEND from one or more resources from the wider network of support, with an additional 11% identifying one or more organisations or services within this group as providing a moderate source of support.

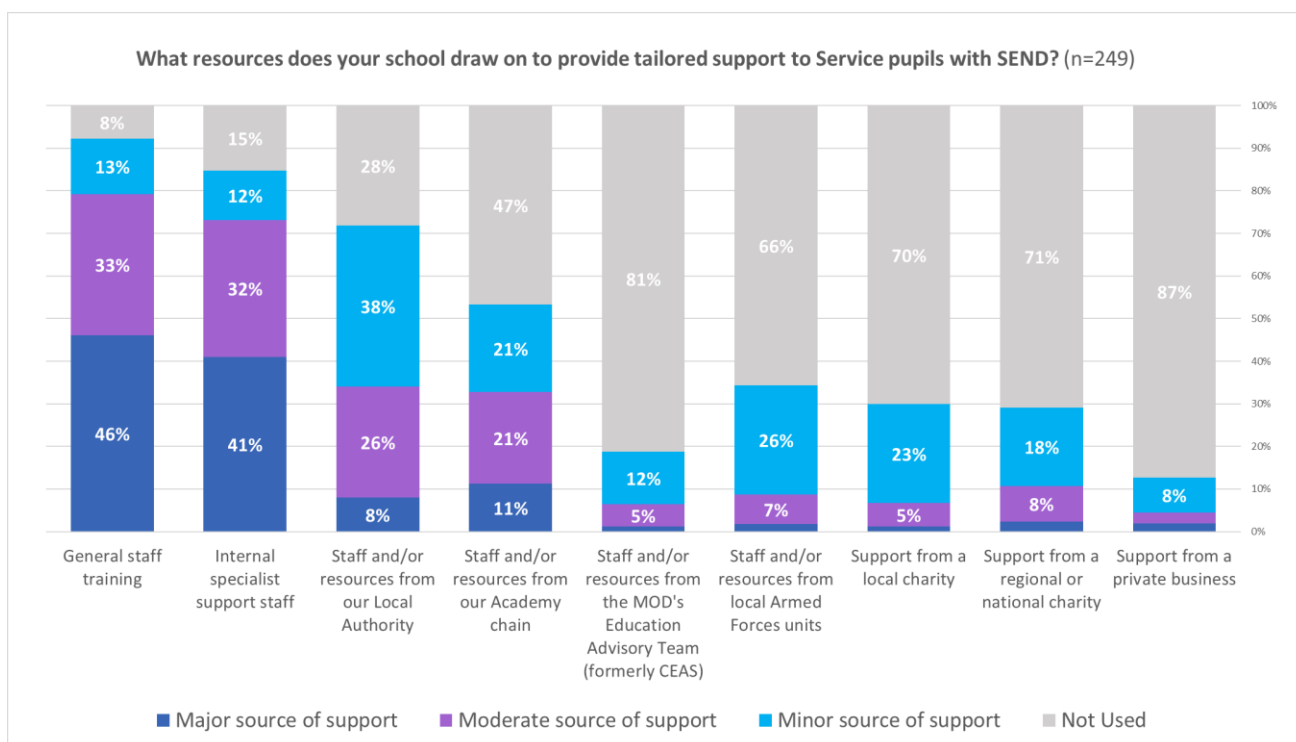


Figure 10: Resources for schools to support Service children with SEND

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There was very little variation in sources of support based on school type or Service representation. Schools with small Service child cohorts were unlikely to draw on support other than that available internally or from the local authority/ Academy chain. Some schools noted that this was due to not being aware of what support was available; others indicated that they struggled to get engagement from a local base or were unable to benefit from a Service-child focused support programme from a charity or other provider, which they believed was due to their low numbers of Service children on roll.

Schools typically drew on a more diverse range of resources and support the larger their Service child cohort. Schools with the largest Service child cohorts were most likely to report good relationships with their local Armed Forces units and engagement with relevant local and/or national charities.

### ***Sources of Support***

Respondents were asked to identify specific organisations or services from which they received effective support and/or advice for supporting Service children with SEND. Around 1 in 5 noted they did not receive any external support (19%), echoing the large reliance on internal resources reported above. The most frequently mentioned sources of support or advice were:

- **Local Authority (35%)**

Just over a third of respondents noted the support of one or more Local Authority service, such as:

- Special Educational Needs Inclusion Services (SENIS);
- SEND Hubs;
- Specialist Teaching Teams;
- Family Learning and/or Support;
- School-Home Support;
- Educational Psychologists.

It is clear that the type and perceived quality of support available varies considerably between different local authorities, with some respondents noting issues linked to mobility where a family had previously benefitted from a particular type of local authority support that was not available in their area.

It is also notable that the vast majority of local authority support reported related to SEND specialisms, with very few instances of these being informed by the Service-child perspective. With 86% of the respondent sample being from local authority areas with the highest numbers of Service children nationally (Quintile 5), it might have been expected to hear about some examples of local authority SEND support that was tailored for Service children. Some of these local authorities have significant Service-child focussed support; but it would appear from the responses received here that Service-child support and SEND support may operate in parallel.

- **Charities (17%)**

Around 1 in 6 schools reported receiving support from charities. These were mostly Service charities (12%), such as the Families Federations, SSAFA, Reading Force, and Little Troopers. Support received was a combination of advice and resources, with a few mentions of specific programmes of direct support to children and families related to SEND needs.

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A smaller number of respondents noted support from family, health and/or disability charities (5%). Typically these were locally available support programmes either from local charities or local branches of national charities such as Home-Start or the NSPCC. Availability of such programmes appears to be sporadic, though highly valued where they are available.

- **Forces Welfare (12%)**

Around 1 in 8 schools reported receiving support from welfare and/or chaplaincy services from either a local unit or wider MOD welfare support. These were almost exclusively those schools with the highest numbers of Service children on roll. Schools with low numbers of Service children on roll were more likely to report a desire to access support from local units, but difficulties achieving this.

- **Inter-School Support (7%)**

Some schools noted strong relationships with other schools in their area, typically schools with small numbers of Service children receiving support from schools with larger cohorts, or mainstream schools receiving support from special schools or Pupil Referral Units. A small number of respondents noted opportunities for their Service children with SEND to access specific therapy sessions at other schools.

Three respondents noted SEND or Service-child specialisms within their Multi-Academy Trust, which involved pupils accessing sessions or support in other schools.

- **Private Consultants (6%)**

Some schools reported buying in specialist support, such as Speech and Language Therapy, Play Therapy or support from Educational Psychologists. Service Pupil Premium funding may be put towards this, but generally doesn't cover the full cost meaning a significant contribution is required from school budgets:

*"We are spending £138K out of our school budget to support pupils with EHCPs, the vast majority of which are Service pupils."*

### **Resources for Parents**

Respondents were asked to identify any organisations, services or resources to which they signposted parents or carers of Service children with SEND. Around 1 in 10 said there was nowhere they signposted parents (9%). Of those who did signpost, the most frequently mentioned support was:

- **Charities (33%)**

A third of schools noted signposting to charities. This was a mix of resources from national charities specialising in specific areas such as autism or mental health, and Service charities such as the Families Federations. A small number of local charities providing practical support were also mentioned.

- **Local Authority (21%)**

Around 1 in 5 respondents noted signposting parents or carers to local authority support, such as Early Help or SEND Information, Advice and Support (SENDIAS) services. A small number of local-authority facilitated peer-support groups were noted (4%). Local authority support for parents and carers was regularly noted to be the same sources of support available to all families with a child with SEND, with no specific Service-child element.

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- **Services Support (14%)**  
Some respondents signposted families to Service-specific support, such as welfare (4%) or chaplaincy (3%) services, or the service referred to as CEAS, now called the MOD Education Advisory Team (2%).
  - **Internal School Support (7%)**  
Some schools noted specific support for parents and carers provided by their own staff, such as family support advisors, SEND specialists, and inclusion practitioners.
  - **Health Support (7%)**  
Some schools noted signposting to local health services, most commonly Child and Adolescent Mental Health services (CAMHS).
  - **Independent Advice (3%)**  
A small number of schools noted signposting to specialist independent support or services. Availability of such support was rare and dependent on local circumstances.

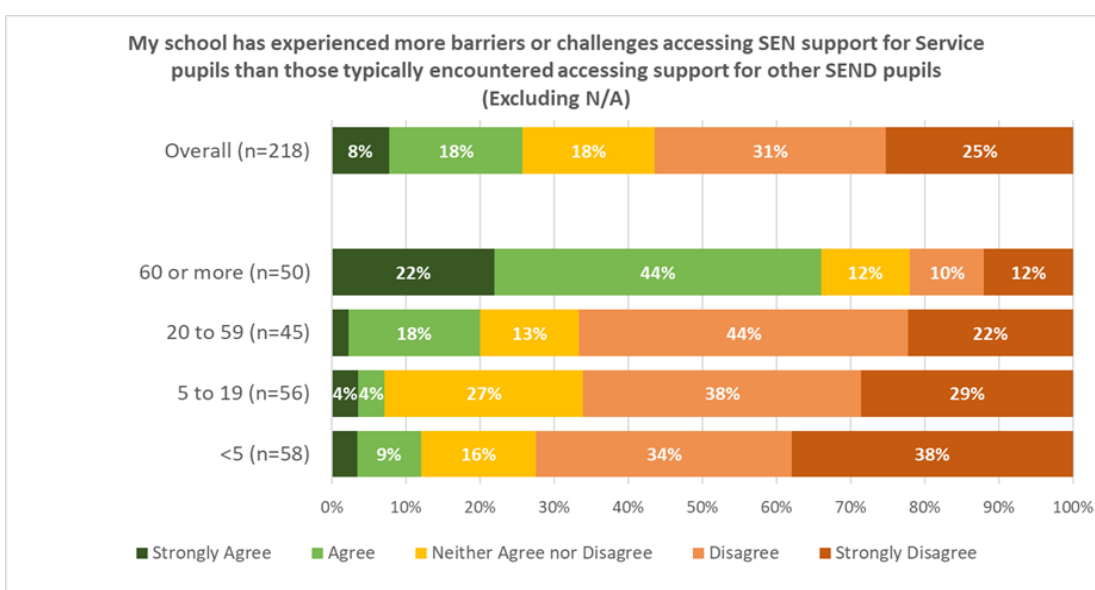
## Section 3 – Barriers, Challenges and Opportunities

### 3.1 Accessing Support

The majority of respondents felt that access to SEN support for Service children with SEND was equivalent to accessing support for all SEND pupils, with 56% of respondents either disagreeing (31%) or strongly disagreeing (25%) with the statement that ‘My school has experienced more barriers or challenges accessing SEN support for Service pupils than those typically encountered accessing support for other SEND pupils’ (fig 11).

However, experiences varied depending on the number of Service children on roll. Only 3% of respondents from schools with fewer than 60 Service children on roll ‘strongly agreed’ that they had experienced more barriers and challenges accessing SEN support for Service children than for other SEND pupils. This rose seven-fold to 22% for those schools with 60 or more Service children on roll. With a further 44% of this group ‘agreeing’, this means that two-thirds of respondents from schools with the largest Service child cohorts had experienced greater barriers accessing SEN support for Service children than for other SEND pupils. It is possible that these schools have less experience of accessing support for other SEND pupils, and so may over-attribute their challenges to a pupil’s Service child identity rather than their SEND needs. It is also possible that these schools are more likely to have cohorts that experience a particular disadvantage, for example due to mobility.

It is notable that no schools with a mainly Royal Navy or Royal Marines cohort were in agreement that they had experienced more barriers or challenges accessing support for their Service children than other SEND pupils, compared with 22% of those with RAF cohorts and 44% for those with British Army cohorts. This suggests that there are some Service related factors affecting these experiences. British Army cohorts are typically the most mobile and Royal Navy cohorts typically the least mobile, so mobility may be one factor. Also, British Army cohorts have a greater proportion of Service children with SEND (fig 7), so these schools may have more experience of seeking support for a greater diversity or complexity of needs.



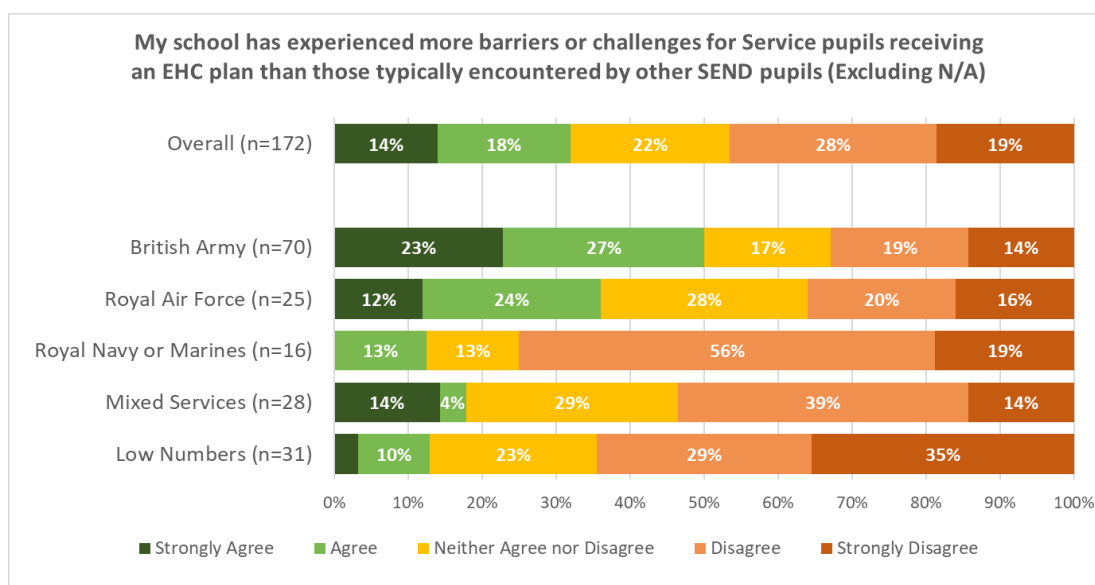
**Figure 11:** Experiences of barriers or challenges accessing SEN support for Service children compared with experiences of accessing support for other SEND pupils, with subgroups based on the number of Service children on roll

### 3.2 Receiving Education Health and Care Plans

Just under half of respondents felt that their experience of receiving an EHCP for Service children with SEND was equivalent to that for all SEND pupils, with 47% of respondents either disagreeing (28%) or strongly disagreeing (19%) with the statement ‘My school has experienced more barriers or challenges for Service pupils receiving an EHC plan than those typically encountered by other SEND pupils’ (fig 12).

However, there were notable differences based on the main Service represented within a school’s Service child cohort. Half of respondents from schools with British Army cohorts either agreed (27%) or strongly agreed (23%) that they had experienced more barriers or challenges receiving an EHCP for their Service children than for non-Service pupils with SEND, as did 36% of respondents from schools with RAF cohorts (24% agree, 12% strongly agree). In contrast, just 13% of respondents from schools with Royal Navy or Royal Marines cohorts agreed they had experienced more barriers or challenges receiving an EHCP for Service children, with none strongly agreeing and three-quarters either disagreeing (56%) or strongly disagreeing (19%) with the statement.

Once again, schools with the greatest number of Service children on roll were most likely to report greater barriers or challenges receiving an EHCP for Service children than for other SEND pupils, with almost three-quarters of respondents from schools with 60 or more Service children on roll either agreeing (43%) or strongly agreeing (30%), and just 18% disagreeing with this statement. Schools with large numbers of Service children are more likely to have British Army or RAF cohorts than Royal Navy or Royal Marines cohorts, and so these observed differences may be due to Service representation, numbers on roll, or a combination of the two.



**Figure 12:** Experiences of barriers or challenges for Service children receiving an EHC plan compared with experiences of receiving EHC plans for other SEND pupils, with subgroups based on the main Service represented in the school Service child cohort

### 3.3 Transition

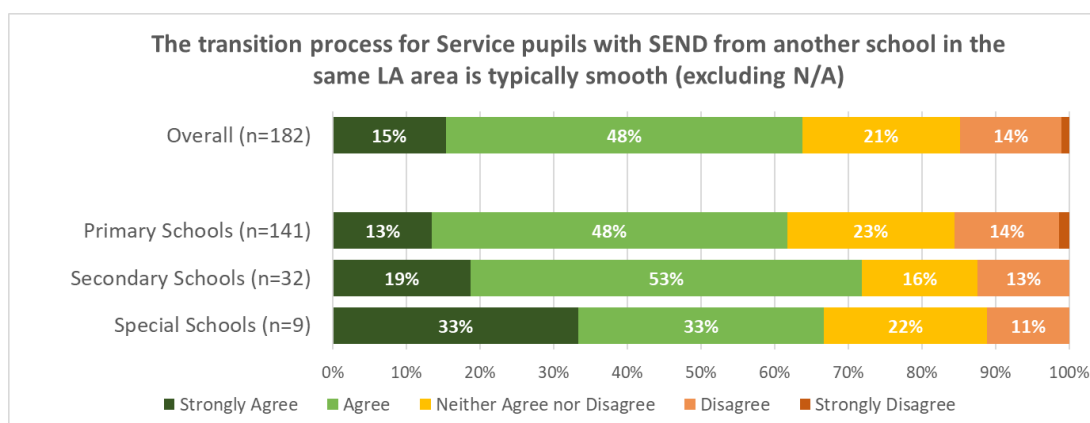
Moving between different schools can be challenging for all pupils, but is widely recognised to be particularly challenging for pupils with SEND.<sup>11,12,13</sup> The vast majority of pupils in mainstream education will experience a transition between schools at some point, most often when moving from primary to secondary phase.

Some Service children experience a higher frequency of transition, in particular related to family mobility linked to the serving parent’s posting. British Army families are typically the most mobile, with RAF families generally experiencing less mobility and Royal Navy families typically the least mobile. Schools with low numbers of Service children are likely to experience less mobility, as their Service families are often either permanently resident (possibly with a serving parent regularly working away), or veteran families.

The questionnaire explored the range of transition experiences for Service children with SEND through three questions focussing on different types of transition.

#### **Transition within a Local Authority Area**

Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement ‘The transition process for Service pupils with SEND from another school in the same LA area is typically smooth’. Almost two-thirds of respondents were in agreement with this statement (63%), with 15% in disagreement and only 1% strongly disagreeing (fig 13). The response pattern was broadly similar across all school types, Service representation and cohort size. This suggests that transitions within LA areas generally work reasonably well.



**Figure 13:** Experiences of transitions for Service children with SEND from another school in the same LA area

#### **Transition from a different Local Authority Area**

Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement ‘The transition process for Service pupils with SEND from a different LA area in England is typically smooth’. Overall, 30% of respondents agreed (24%) or strongly agreed (6%) that transition from a different local authority area was smooth (fig 14). Disagreement with this statement was notably higher, with 30% disagreeing and 12% strongly disagreeing that the transition process for Service children with SEND from a different local authority area in England is typically smooth. Schools with larger cohorts of Service children were somewhat more likely to disagree, with 61% of respondents from schools with 60 or more Service children either disagreeing (47%) or strongly disagreeing (14%).

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/248534741> School transitions: Beginning of the end or a new beginning?

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241563201> The Impact of School Transitions on Pupil Progress and Attainment

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232944772> Helping secondary schools to be more inclusive of Year 7 pupils with SEN

It is worth noting differences in 'N/A' responses (fig 15). Half of schools with a Royal Navy or Royal Marines cohort selected 'N/A' (50%), suggesting that they did not have experience of Service children with SEND arriving from a different local authority area, compared with less than a quarter of schools with a mostly RAF cohort (23%) and around 1 in 8 of schools with a mostly British Army cohort (13%). This variation is in line with noted differences in family mobility for the different Services, and so it is plausible that mobility explains at least part of the observed difference.

Despite these Service based differences in the likelihood of having experienced a Service child with SEND arriving from a different local authority area, the pattern of agreement and disagreement among those with this experience was broadly similar across subgroups based on Service representation (fig 14). So although a school with a mostly Royal Navy or Royal Marines cohort would be less likely to have experience of a Service child with SEND arriving from a different local authority area, those who did expressed similar opinions on how smooth the transition process had been to respondents from schools with British Army or RAF cohorts.

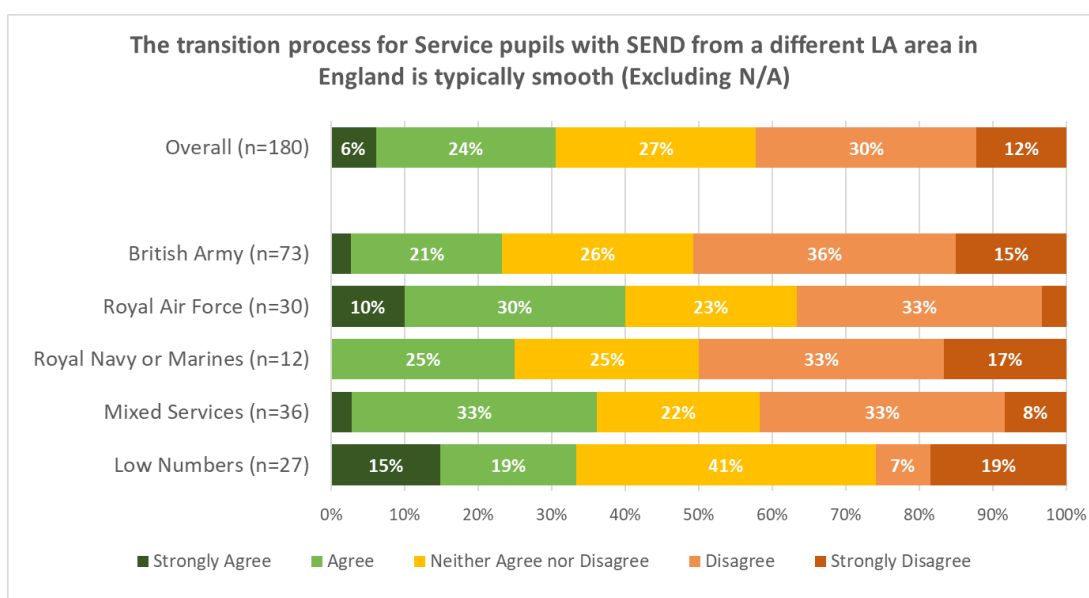


Figure 14: Experiences of transitions for Service children with SEND from a different LA area in England

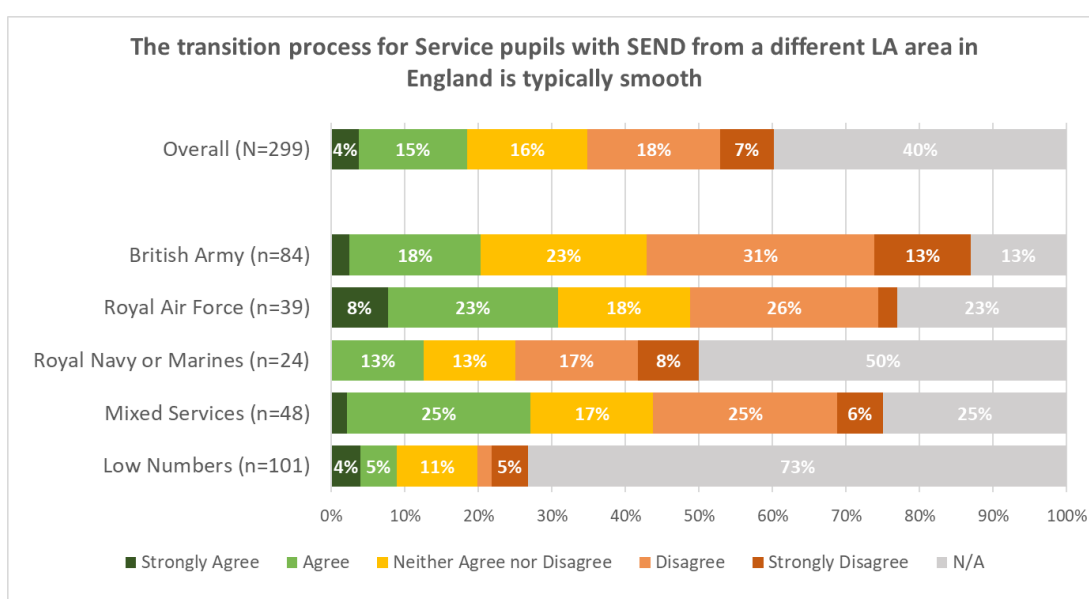
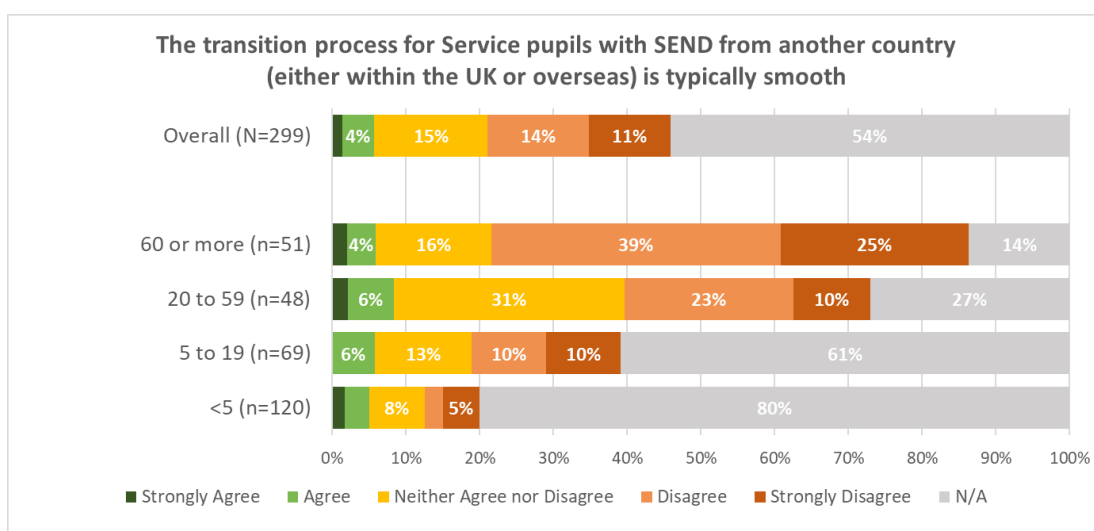


Figure 15: Experiences of transitions for Service children with SEND from a different LA area in England, with subgroups based on the main Service represented within the Service child cohort, including N/A

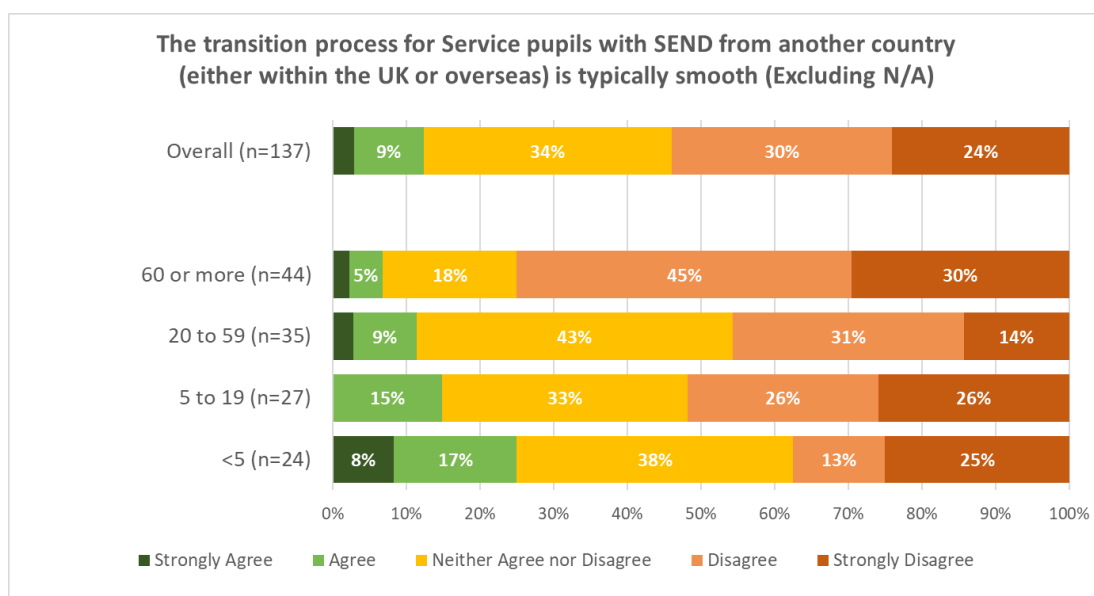
### Transition from a different country

Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement 'The transition process for Service pupils with SEND from another country (either within the UK or overseas) is typically smooth'. It is important to note that over half of respondents gave a 'N/A' response to this question (54%), indicating that they did not have experience of a Service child with SEND arriving from either another home nation or overseas (fig 16).

For those with experience of a Service child with SEND arriving from another country, more than half were in disagreement that the transition process had been smooth (54%), with 30% disagreeing and 24% strongly disagreeing with the statement (fig 17), and just 12% in agreement. Responses based on the main Service cohort were broadly similar. Schools with RAF cohorts were somewhat more likely to be in agreement that the transition process is typically smooth, with 22% either agreeing (13%) or strongly agreeing (8%) with the statement, compared with 9% of schools with British Army cohorts. No schools with a Royal Navy or Royal Marines cohort were in agreement, though the majority of these schools gave an 'N/A' response (63%).



**Figure 16:** Experiences of transitions for Service children with SEND from outside England, including N/A responses, with subgroups based on the Service child cohort size



**Figure 17:** Experiences of transitions for Service children with SEND from outside England

Schools with the largest Service child cohorts were somewhat more likely to disagree that the transition process for Service children with SEND arriving from another country is typically smooth, with three-quarters either disagreeing (45%) or strongly disagreeing (30%), compared with 54% of respondents overall (fig 17).

### **Comments about mobility**

Respondents were given the opportunity to add free text notes to clarify or contextualise their responses to the quantitative scale questions. Of those providing comments about the details of their experience, three-quarters referred to transition challenges related to mobility. These covered two main areas: delayed assessment of needs, and disruption to support for Service children with SEND.

The majority of comments related to movement between schools, which is a known challenge for both Service children and children with SEND. This indicates that Service children with SEND who experience mobility are likely to experience significant challenges. It was also noted that transition presented particular additional challenges for pupils with autistic spectrum condition (ASC). Six key themes were identified, as follows:

- **Limited or delayed transfer of information**

Transfer of information to a Service child's new school was frequently noted as a gap. Receiving schools would highlight gaps in, or a complete absence of, information on SEND needs. Sometimes these gaps could be filled by spending time and resource chasing the previous school, but not always. Gaps were typically greater when a Service child had arrived from outside the LA area or from overseas, but gaps in information within LA areas were also noted:

*"As a school, we aim to pass on information as early as possible to new schools to support as smooth a transition as possible. Sadly, we rarely have this with children joining us. Information from schools is scarce, often only received after we have requested."*

*"Communication between schools (within and across local authorities) can be problematic. This can be exacerbated if a child moves with a higher frequency."*

*"Information around students with SEND from other LA's often has to be chased by school once the child arrives."*

- **Discontinuity of support**

Where a Service child has been receiving support from external agencies, transition typically means this support is halted. Despite having had their needs assessed and a support package in place, many respondents reported 'having to start again' with making referrals. Many comments were made about agencies not accepting assessments undertaken by their peers in other areas, and giving no priority to continuity of support that had been provided elsewhere. This indicates a common failure to uphold the Armed Forces Covenant, which states that professionals should consider how support can continue with minimal disruption after re-locations:<sup>14</sup>

*"Children with an additional need who move into the school from another LA/country have to be referred into the required service - i.e. paed's, speech and language. This makes waiting times longer for them."*

*"If they move [Clinical Commissioning Groups] they are placed at the bottom of the waiting list for identification of needs - S&L and ASC. Paperwork from Health is not shared with schools and this is a real barrier when families do not understand how schools access additional support and funding."*

<sup>14</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/636a3e10d3bf7f16484798b0/Armed\\_Forces\\_Covenant\\_Duty\\_Statutory\\_Guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/636a3e10d3bf7f16484798b0/Armed_Forces_Covenant_Duty_Statutory_Guidance.pdf) p33

- **Absence of joined up processes**

Each local authority in England has difference processes, with an apparent lack of flexibility to utilise assessments undertaken elsewhere. Similar to access from external agencies having to be restarted from scratch, several respondents noted how SEND assessments typically have to be started afresh, contrary to statutory guidance<sup>15</sup>. In some cases, this was noted to be necessary as the nature of support and resources available varies in different areas and so details of an EHCP completed elsewhere may not be deliverable in the new location. However, respondents indicated that this is typically handled by restarting the process from scratch, rather than drawing on knowledge of the previous support that was in place to provide a timely response. In any case, the lack of joined up processes and inconsistent provision across the country makes transitions between local authority areas particularly challenging for Service children with SEND:

*“Cycles of intervention can be different in different LAs and don't always marry up so we often end up having to start afresh which isn't ideal for the child and is frustrating for the family.”*

*“If a child moves from one LA to another, the SEND pathway is completely different. High mobility is a disadvantaging factor to pupils with SEND.”*

*“Children with severe and complex SEND needs coming over from another country is tricky as the protocols and procedures are not the same and most of the time we have to start the EHCP process.”*

- **Delayed assessment of need**

The previous themes have focussed on disruption to the support provided to Service children with SEND as they move between different schools or local authority areas. However, a significant proportion of respondents noted that mobility often delayed assessment of a Service child's SEND needs, leading to an absence of support.

One of the consequences of the lack of joined up processes noted above is that work undertaken on preparing EHCPs before they are submitted is often not recognised by the receiving local authority. This means that mobile Service children who move before an EHCP is completed typically have to start the process again, with the added disadvantage of their new setting having less direct experience of their needs. Some Service children with SEND are even prevented from starting the process for an EHCP, as the knowledge this is unlikely to be completed before their next move leads to resources being allocated elsewhere. This leaves Service children with SEND experiencing a significant gap in the support they receive.

Although schools are able to provide internal support for Service children with SEND who do not have an EHCP, frequent moves and a lack of information being passed from previous schools can mean that needs are not identified until a crisis is experienced:

*“Pre EHCP paperwork differs from county to county so often need to restart rather than transfer - often delays assessment for mobile children.”*

*“It is hard for families who may be waiting for SALT/AS/ADHD pathways in another LA then are redeployed as they need to start referrals again.”*

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<sup>15</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7dcb85ed915d2ac884d995/SEND\\_Code\\_of\\_Practice\\_January\\_2015.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7dcb85ed915d2ac884d995/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf) p220

*“There is no joined up thinking between LAs in EHCP. Therefore, unless a child is remaining in one LA for a lengthy time then it becomes pointless in starting an EHCP.”*

*“Far too many children arrive with us in various years and have not been assessed thoroughly enough and so have not had their needs met. In some cases, EHCP applications have been held off because their previous school has felt that there is no point because the child will be moving.”*

*“We have had one pupil who has moved schools so often that his SEN needs were not picked up until crisis point in Year 5.”*

- **Lack of understanding among support agencies**

There was a general feeling that awareness of the particular circumstances of Service children among non-Service agencies was typically limited or non-existent. This results, it was suggested, in a lack of flexibility of processes to overcome any particular disadvantage experienced by Service children with SEND, and means that concerns about these disadvantages are routinely dismissed.

Given that the sample consisted mostly of respondents from those areas with the largest Service child cohorts (fig 4), this suggests a significant gap in the understanding of agencies that perhaps indicates a structural disadvantage for mobile Service children with SEND:

*“I have found that the life of a Service child is still relatively not understood by other agencies. Whilst they are aware of the armed forces covenant their organisations have systems in place that don't help schools who admit a child with SEND needs who may have moved to 2 or 3 times during the previous 4 yrs and so is constantly not getting appointments for assessments.”*

- **Specific challenges for Service children with ASC**

A small number of respondents noted that transitions were particularly challenging for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Condition. This is a general challenge for all pupils with ASC, rather than a specific challenge for Service children with ASC, though may indicate a particularly high-risk subgroup within the cohort:

*“For children with ASC, the transitions are particularly disruptive.”*

*“[R]egular moves through postings can cause challenges for pupils with ASD who don't cope well with change! A hazard of the job, but unsettling nonetheless.”*

### 3.4 Service Children's Assessment of Need (SCAN)

A SCAN is an assessment of the SEN needs of a Service child in an overseas MOD Defence Children Services (DCS) school. The underlying principles are similar to an EHCP, in that the SCAN sets out the Service child's needs and outlines the provision that the school should make to meet those needs. Statutory guidance states that local authorities should utilise a SCAN when designing provision for Service children with SEND arriving from overseas.<sup>16</sup>

Only 16 questionnaire respondents had experience of a Service child arriving from overseas with a SCAN. As such, it is not possible to draw statistical conclusions on the experiences of

<sup>16</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7dcb85ed915d2ac884d995/SEND\\_Code\\_of\\_Practice\\_January\\_2015.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7dcb85ed915d2ac884d995/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf) p221

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schools receiving Service children with SCAN documents. Nevertheless, responses from this small sample were broadly consistent.

Respondents were asked ‘How have SCAN documents helped your school support the successful transition of Service children with SEND arriving from overseas?’. Most respondents were of the view that the SCAN had helped them to understand the child’s needs quickly and efficiently, and to put in place relevant internal support:

*“The SCAN documents are useful to begin with. Knowing both the child’s needs and the external services that have been involved before a child comes to us is a useful starting point.”*

*“Supporting professional reports were very helpful.”*

*“The SCAN is helpful - however it can only really be treated as a support plan.”*

*“The SCAN document gives the relevant SEND information required to make provision for the child.”*

*“It can help us evaluate the child’s needs.”*

In order to explore the success of SCAN documents supporting EHCPs, respondents were asked ‘Where a SCAN document has been converted to an EHC Plan, what went well with this process and what could have been improved?’ Most respondents had found this to be a challenging process. Echoing the broader challenges of local authorities and agencies not recognising or understanding assessments undertaken elsewhere, the majority of respondents indicated that their local authority did not recognise or make use of the SCAN document. Where an EHCP has subsequently been provided, this has not been an easy or straightforward process for our respondents:

*“It took a long time for the SCAN to transfer into an EHCP.”*

*“It was an absolute challenge and services were not in place for them.”*

*“Eventual success after hard lobbying of LA.”*

*“Child arrived with SCAN and we had to fight to have this recognised as an EHCP.”*

There was general agreement that, as SCAN documents are written in the style of an EHCP, transition should be a straightforward process. However, this was not the experience of respondents:

*“It would be a much better system if the SCAN document was regarded as the equivalent to an EHCP. As the transfer from one to the other is another time consuming and complex process.”*

*“There should be automatic conversion to an appropriately banded EHCP with no wrangling and chasing required.”*

Additional responses were received from overseas schools that had experience of preparing SCAN documents and sharing these with a Service child’s new school. These indicated that there are some local authorities in England that have an awareness and acceptance of SCAN documents, and that where this is the case then transition can work well:

*“The process has been successful when the LA has accepted the SCAN document and made changes to what can be offered from their LA.”*

### 3.5 Desired Changes

Respondents were asked ‘*What single change do you think would most improve the effectiveness of support provided to your school's Service pupils with SEND?*’ Around 1 in 12 were of the opinion that no changes were needed (8%). Two reasons were given: either the school had very low numbers of Service children and even fewer (or no) Service children with SEND; or they were of the view that improvements should be made to the overall SEND approach rather than there being a need for any specific Service-child focussed changes.

Of those who suggested a change, there was a difference of opinion on whether or not this was distinctive from changes they think would most improve the effectiveness of support provided for other SEND pupils. Three groups were identified, associated to some extent to the number of Service children on roll:

- **Universal improvement:** around a quarter of respondents were of the opinion that changes to improve support for Service children with SEND were essentially the same as those that would improve support for all SEND pupils. These were mostly schools with low or very low numbers of Service children on roll, and typically focussed on funding and/ or communication with the local authority;
- **Specific improvements:** around a quarter of respondents were of the opinion that Service children with SEND had specific needs that required tailored approaches explicitly recognising the pupil's Service child identity. These were mostly schools with moderate to large numbers of Service children on roll, and typically focussed on engagement with Armed Forces units or specific aspects of Service life such as deployment or mobility;
- **Weighted changes:** around half of respondents noted that their suggested changes would be of benefit to their wider cohort of pupils with SEND, but would address a need or challenge that is disproportionately experienced by Service children. Key examples are transition, and the impact of parents working away: although these experiences are neither unique to Service children nor experienced by all Service children, most respondents noted that the majority- sometimes all- of pupils with SEND in their school who had these experiences were Service children. This view was expressed by respondents from schools of all sizes of Service child cohorts, in particular those with moderate sized cohorts (20 to 59).

Analysis of the desired changes suggested by respondents identified six main themes:

- **A More Cohesive Transition Process (20%)**  
One in 5 respondents noted desired changes related to transition between schools, typically as a result of mobility. These responses covered four key areas:
  - **Timely transfer of information**  
Delays in receipt of information about a Service child's SEND needs were raised frequently, with frustrations noted with the delays this caused to putting appropriate support in place. Speedier and more consistent transfer of information was desired, in particular for pupils who move frequently:  
*“Better communication on transition and a consistency in paperwork so needs are clearer quicker and the right kind of support can be in place prior to the transition.”*  
*“Speedier process on accessing the SEND files from other LA.”*  
*“A national system of holding and transferring data so that any future transitions due to deployment or mobility are as good as possible.”*

- **Greater consistency in processes**  
Different local authorities and health providers follow different processes for undertaking the same assessments, and this was identified as a significant source of frustration. Even where the availability of support differs, the details of a pupil's needs will be consistent. Respondents suggested, therefore, that a national template should be achievable, and the introduction of consistent processes would make a substantial positive impact towards easing transitions:

*“A SEND 'passport' which goes with them from one school to another.”*

*“Agreed EHCP process across all LAs.”*

*“Agreed pro forma for sharing information across all LAs.”*

- **Expediated assessments when moving between areas**  
Mobility delays assessment of needs, as Service children moving between local authority or NHS areas are typically moved to the bottom of waiting lists, and/or assessments are restarted from scratch. This creates significant disadvantage for mobile cohorts, that would be effectively addressed if providers took note of assessments already undertaken and time already spent on waiting lists elsewhere:

*“The ability to transfer to NHS services and waiting lists from one locality to another without having to start the process from scratch.”*

*“Quicker access to services (ed psych/ sp&l/ MHST for example) and being able to escalate children up waiting lists when they have moved school due to relocation.”*

*“It seems we have to start all over again when a children joins with a special need. It would be good for the assessment process to continue from where it was as they left the previous school.”*

- **Increased awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant**  
The issue of mobile Service children moving to the bottom of waiting lists or having to restart assessments is contrary to the statutory guidance for the Armed Forces Covenant. In relation to NHS services, this aims to “ensure that the Service family keeps its relative place on the waiting list in their new area, when possible”<sup>17</sup> and states that local authorities “should ensure that the impact of their policies, administrative processes and patterns of provision do not disadvantage [Service children with SEND] because of their Service-related lifestyle”.<sup>18</sup> Respondents suggested that, in many areas, awareness of and/or adherence to at least the spirit of the Armed Forces Covenant was very low. As the majority of respondents were from areas with high numbers of Service children, this suggests a significant gap in understanding and/or practice. Several respondents suggested a need to raise awareness of and adherence to the Armed Forces Covenant and/or

<sup>17</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/636a3e10d3bf7f16484798b0/Armed\\_Forces\\_Covenant\\_Duty\\_Statutory\\_Guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/636a3e10d3bf7f16484798b0/Armed_Forces_Covenant_Duty_Statutory_Guidance.pdf) p33

<sup>18</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7dcb85ed915d2ac884d995/SEND\\_Code\\_of\\_Practice\\_January\\_2015.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7dcb85ed915d2ac884d995/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf) p219

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provide a source of support or mediation in cases where the covenant did not appear to be being fairly applied:

*“External providers and LA SEND teams to honour the Covenant and place children on the waiting list at where they may have left off in a previous LA.”*

*“The Military Covenant to be more visible to other services, particularly Health.”*

*“Armed forces covenant being fairly applied and a point of contact to speak to when this is not the case to support children, families and schools.”*

- **Additional Funding (14%)**

Around 1 in 7 respondents noted the limitations of funding and available resources. This was a variable picture across the country. Some respondents noted sufficient access to resources, though the majority indicated that their local authority’s resources for SEND support was, at best, stretched and often inadequate. This meant that many respondents favoured increased resources for all SEND pupils:

*“Funding seems to be linked to pupils with an EHCP and yet it is increasingly hard to gain one for pupils. More pupils should be supported at SEN support through adequate funding.”*

*“The overwhelming need for ALL SEND children is the need for funding to allocate additional support staff and resources.”*

*“Greater funding to allow for more staff time to support pupils and for staff to access available training.”*

Other respondents noted that specific aspects of a Service child’s experience can have a significant impact on their support needs. This would benefit from additional specific resources, in particular to provide targeted support at known times of increased risk such as following relocation or when a parent is working away:

*“More money given to these pupils on top of their [Service Pupil Premium] to further support the provision for their SEND needs.”*

*“It usually takes a while to ensure children moving are at least in line with other peers and that takes extra time. Time is then devoted to identifying any gaps and providing for those gaps. It is always recognised that the children need pastoral support when they arrive in school. If an SEN service child is admitted to a school then it would help to have additional funding so other resources can be used.”*

- **Service-Focussed Support (8%)**

Around 1 in 12 respondents suggested potential benefits to be gained from raising awareness of the specific experiences and needs of Service children, and having greater access to support that is responsive to these needs and experiences:

*“Everyone should have training around the processes and difficulties service families encounter.”*

*“Trauma informed teacher training to address possible attachment needs.”*

*“We have in the past had Services children who have needed social and emotional care - when parents have been posted - especially if the area they have gone to is featuring heavily in the news.”*

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- **Improved Communication (6%)**

Some respondents suggested a need for improved communication with the local authority, other providers, and the family's wider network:

*"Enhanced communication between settings and external professionals."*

*"More communication between LA/Trust and Defence children service to provide a coherent package of support."*

*"Better communication with Local Authority."*

- **Wellbeing Support for Pupils and Families (5%)**

One in 20 respondents noted a need for wellbeing support that is informed by the particular experiences of Service children. This included additional resources to respond to SEMH needs that were reported to co-occur more frequently among Service children than with other pupils with SEND. A need for support for families was also noted, in particular support for the home parent when the serving parent is working away:

*"External offers of therapeutic support as this is not achievable for these children within school's budget."*

*"More nurture support time with ELSA trained staff."*

*"Specific support around social skills and communication and interaction. It would be helpful to have a group package of intervention that was consistently used amongst schools in order that mobility does not interrupt the support given."*

*"Support for the parent that is home caring."*

*"Ensuring their parents are well supported to ensure they are well supported."*

- **More Timely Referral Processing (4%)**

Some respondents suggested a need for shorter wait times for assessments and support. These were typically viewed to be limitations of SEND support in general, rather than a specific barrier for Service children:

*"Probably the same as for all pupils with SEND - a more timely access to professionals in order to support us to better support the children."*

*"Shorter wait times for outside agencies like paediatricians and speech and language."*

*"Speed of access to services and speed of assessments. Luckily our Service pupils are not very mobile, but if they were relocating regularly/repeatedly they would struggle given how long everything takes."*

## Section 4 – Key Messages for Stakeholders

Respondents were asked to identify what works well and what improvements they would like to see when liaising with local Armed Forces units and their Local Authority in relation to Service children with SEND. Views were also sought on national structures and policies. Examples of strong practice were identified by some respondents, although overall these would appear to currently be the exception rather than the norm, with no more than 5% of respondents identifying something that works well within each theme.

### 4.1 Armed Forces Units

The majority of respondents (70%) did not report any contact with their local Armed Forces unit(s). Some reported efforts to establish contact, which had not yet been successful:

*“Unfortunately there is a [distinct] lack of support with our local Units. We have tried to set up meetings on several occasions.”*

*“The school do not have any named liaison which makes contact with us to offer support or advice. We understand from our families that this is something that should be in place.”*

#### **Works Well**

- **Personal Interests and Contacts**

Some respondents noted strong relationships with their local units. Typically, these relied on specific individuals who had a particular personal commitment or interest in Service children with SEND. When individuals changed role, good relationships were sometimes lost. The most effective reported relationships were often linked with direct interest from a senior figure in the chain of command. Others reported the benefits of personal contacts of their schools staff:

*“The chain of command in our locality are excellent and very concerned at the level of complex SEND need within the local battalion. The CO [...] has been proactive in liaising with schools and EYFS settings [...]”*

*“We have a very strong relationship with the battalion chain of command who are very supportive. The welfare officer is an almost daily visitor to the setting.”*

*“This fluctuates according to who is in post. We have had wonderful liaison, we have had some less so. This is a personal issue.”*

*“Personal contacts works well. We have had teachers who have serving personnel for neighbours who have signposted us to various initiatives.”*

- **Partnership Activities**

Some respondents noted practical activities and support provided in partnership with their local units, which were highly valued:

*“I have set-up a link with a local Tri-Services base. They come once a month, if possible, and work with a group of mixed service and non-service children. They run STEM based interactive, team building, problem-solving activities. They are always prepared to be fully inclusive and are kind and considerate to our SEND child / children. These events boost the self-esteem of all children and particularly SEND children who are included and can demonstrate their own unique skills.”*

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- **Welfare Support**

A small number of respondents noted specific welfare-focussed support, either in general or linked to specific times of challenge, such as transition:

*“Chaplains are our best liaison and the most consistent.”*

*“Excellent transition and ongoing support for service students transferring from school on RAF base.”*

### **Areas for Improvement**

- **Greater Interaction**

Almost a quarter of respondents expressed a desire for improved communication with local Armed Forces units, in particular welfare teams. Schools with smaller cohorts noted how some local units would engage with schools with larger cohorts of Service children but not with them, which was a source of frustration. Engagement was viewed as beneficial for all Service children, but of particular potential benefit for those with SEND needs:

*“More engagement from local units would be good. We have tried to reach out repeatedly but receive limited response.”*

*“For local Armed Forces Units to provide schools with Service Children a contact to liaise and arrange support for the children we have here.”*

*“Come into schools with smaller cohorts to provide information (other schools have a higher proportion of Service children in our area).”*

*“Trying to build and maintain links with the welfare team at the camp could help provide a wider range of support to the families, particularly where the SEND need presents in behaviour.”*

*“We would like more contact with welfare on the base.”*

- **Service Related Support**

A small number of respondents highlighted a desire for specific support related to Service life. This included providing support for schools to fully understand the particular experiences of Services families, and to provide support at times of transition and mobility to enable school moves to be as smooth as possible for Service children with SEND:

*“Enhanced focus on mental health support, considering the unique stresses faced by service families.”*

*“Service pupils transferring to secondary school who had received support from Armed Forces Units at Primary School should have a period of support during transition to their new school.”*

*“More information about SEND learners coming in the next battalion moves.”*

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## 4.2 Local Authorities

### **Works Well**

- **Named Contacts**

A small number of respondents noted that they had a named case worker and/or LA contact for Service children with SEND, and this typically delivered a positive experience for the school and family:

*“Good communication with the allocated SEND officer.”*

- **Good Communication**

A small number of respondents praised their local authority for good communication, with examples of specific support when receiving new Service children with SEND, and examples of good practice such as annual review meetings:

*“Good communication when moving into the area.”*

*“Yearly annual meeting with agencies and key decision makers works well each year.”*

### **Areas for Improvement**

- **Greater Service Awareness**

Around 1 in 5 respondents expressed the opinion that local authority practitioners were lacking in understanding of the particular needs of and potential disadvantages experienced by Service children, and/ or that local authority processes were inflexible and unresponsive to these needs, placing Service children with SEND at a structural disadvantage. There was a desire for greater recognition of the cohort’s needs, flexibility to meet these equitably, and suggestions of specialist roles to be created in those areas with high numbers of Service children:

*“Greater understanding from LA of support needed quickly for service pupils with SEND.”*

*“I don't think the LA understand or see any difference.”*

*“Local Authority needs to recognise the importance of sticking to statutory timescales for service children as they may leave the area.”*

*“Maybe have someone who oversees provision specifically for service children with SEND in an advisory role.”*

*“Recognition of the particular needs of Service Children above and beyond the general cohort.”*

*“LA to have an Army/SEN Case Officer provision - this would provide specialist support for Service Children which is embedded within the Local Authority SEND offer.”*

*“Children being accelerated through processes to enable them to get support earlier rather than waiting for normal ‘times’. e.g. a child awaiting EHCP can move from another county, and then end up back at the beginning of the 20 week waiting period.”*

*“Access to a flexible EP who can work in a way to support the school with new arrivals ensuring that provision can be swiftly put in place and support given to the teacher around strategies to use.”*

*“The LA use a consistent approach for all children with SEND but this is then at a detriment to those service families.”*

- **Additional Resources**

There was recognition that local authority SEND resources are generally stretched. Several respondents noted that local authorities needed to allocate more resources to SEND services in general and services for Service children with SEND in particular, though this is probably an issue to be addressed through national allocation of resources to local authorities rather than by local authorities themselves:

*“Improvements: more support in general. The provision is minimal at the moment, we have to source support from within or private companies.”*

*“Limited funding and support for these children and this is a national crisis.”*

*“More capacity from LA services in order to support all children with SEND not just Armed Forces.”*

*“More funding received to support Service Children with SEND.”*

*“The main challenge is that all services are working at capacity and there can be delays in receiving support.”*

- **Improved Communication**

Some respondents noted a desire for improved communication. Comments included a need for local authorities to pass on information in a more timely fashion, and for there to be a specific point of contact for Service children with SEND:

*“Better communication and access to specific services would help across the board.”*

*“Local Authority passing on the information when the school place is applied for.”*

*“A knowledgeable point of contact.”*

*“A dedicated SEND support worker to travel the county to support schools with Service pupils with SEND.”*

### 4.3 National Structures and Policies

A very small proportion of respondents noted areas of national structures and policies relating to Service children with SEND that they thought worked well, in contrast to the majority of responses received:

*“EHCPs provide a joined-up approach, coordinating services from various sectors to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND.”*

*“The [Service Pupil Premium] funding for them allows us to provide pastoral support where needed.”*

#### **Areas for Improvement**

- **Consistent Approach**

Some respondents noted a desire for consistent processes and/or greater portability of assessments across the country, in order to address the significant disadvantages that Service children with SEND experience as a result of mobility. Suggestions were made for centrally monitored support for highly mobile cohorts, and specific resources to support transition as a result of Armed Forces mobility:

*“[A] linkage between areas and countries so all SEND documents link up easier.”*

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*“An overall plan making services and data national / international rather than very regional.”*

*“Better transferability of referrals.”*

*“A passport of need to be set up and monitored centrally if a family have high mobility.”*

*“Consistent approaches to paperwork (EHCP) to aid transition.”*

*“Generally - more support for service pupils wrt movement between schools.”*

- **Improved Evidence Base and Guidance**

Some respondents suggested a need for greater research to understand the specific experiences and impacts for Service children with SEND, and/or improved information and resources to inform support:

*“A specific strategy around how the provision could/should differ to those who are not service pupils.”*

*“Specific research on the life and experiences of SEND pupils and families in the service community.”*

*“Cohesive centralised support to ensure children with complex needs have a single point of access whilst EHCPs are being processed and to support families with this [...]”*

*“Further guidance on what is available so that we are equipped with knowledge of what support/resources are available.”*

- **Financial Sustainability**

Some respondents noted an apparent lack of resources in general for SEND support, and the need for this to be addressed by central Government:

*“A much greater level of funding to support the SEND needs, pastoral needs, academic needs and safeguarding needs of this group of children.”*

*“Financial support to provide the additional provision that children require.”*

*“Funding being adequate to fund necessary support. The LA can insist on schools only using the service premium funding which is inadequate for a high need SEND pupil.”*

*“Not enough budget to offer the support as outlined in policy, raising parents expectations above what schools can afford.”*

*“It needs a complete overhaul. There is so much that is not working properly. The funding model means SEND children generally are not sufficiently supported. Military SEND and general SEND are seriously under-funded.”*

- **Earlier Intervention**

A small number of respondents noted a need for shorter assessment timescales to allow support to be provided before needs escalate:

*“A more accurate relaying of information and the time frame for assessing Service children to be reduced to ensure support is provided in a timely manner.”*

## Section 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusions

Service children are not a homogenous cohort, and Service children with SEND even less so. Responses to this questionnaire identified apparent variations in the experiences and views of schools that have Service children with SEND on roll. Key variations are linked to factors including the size of the school's Service child cohort and the main Armed Forces Service represented within the cohort. There is not a unified group of Service children with SEND who all share a similar experience and have a specific set of needs and opportunities.

Even where subgroup differences are observed, there is variation in experiences and opinions expressed within each subgroup. To some extent, this is likely to be because the experiences of subgroups are not homogenous. For example, British Army families are more likely than families with a parent serving in the Royal Navy to live on a base, but by no means all British Army families live on a base. There are also indications that significant variations exist in local authority SEND services and other support agencies, both in terms of details of support offered and their perceived effectiveness, which adds further complexity to understanding the experiences of this group.

As such, the conclusions made in this section and subsequent recommendations do not necessarily apply to all Service children with SEND, and may not be relevant in every area. Nevertheless, they are significant findings relevant to at least a sizable subgroup of Service children in England with SEND.

The questionnaire had a good response rate, with comparative subgroup sample sizes that broadly match national data, for example of the relative sizes of the different Services in terms of numbers of personnel. The majority of responses were from areas with the highest number of Service children, with responses from all 11 local authority areas that together account for 50% of Service children on roll in England. We can be confident, therefore, that our findings reflect representative experiences of a significant proportion of schools who have Service children with SEND on roll. Some elements will need to be explored in more detail to develop a more nuanced understanding, and some important factors may yet to be identified, such as the complexity of the characteristics and experiences of the overall cohort of Service children with SEND. Despite this, there can be confidence that actions informed by evidence within this report will have a robust foundation to make a positive impact.

#### 5.1.1 Key Variations

There was very little evident variation in responses based on the type of school, with broadly similar responses from primary and secondary schools, and from special and mainstream schools. Variations in the experiences and views of schools with Service children with SEND on roll were observed in subgroups constructed based on the number of Service children on roll, and on the main Service represented within the school's Service child cohort:

- ***Number of Service children on roll at the school***

Overall, schools with larger Service child cohorts were more likely to report more frequent, distinctive, and complex needs and challenges among their cohort of Service children with SEND than did schools with smaller cohorts;

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- **Service representation**

Schools with mainly British Army cohorts were more likely to report disproportionate challenges, relative to other pupils with SEND, with accessing SEN support and agreeing EHCPs for their Service children than were schools with mainly RAF cohorts, who in turn were more likely to report challenges than schools with mainly Royal Navy/Royal Marines cohorts. There were, however, few differences related to the perceived quality of support and communication in relation to implementation of an agreed EHCP once it had been agreed.

Schools with mainly Royal Navy/Royal Marines cohorts and/or low numbers of Service children on roll were much less likely to have experience of a Service child with SEND arriving from outside their local authority area than did schools with larger numbers of Service children. However, schools that had experience of Service children with SEND arriving from outside their LA area all reported similar experiences, regardless of Service representation or size of cohort. The majority found this to be a challenging process that did not enable a smooth transition.

### 5.1.2 The Impact of Mobility

There is strong evidence to suggest that mobility risks creating a specific and significant disadvantage for Service children with SEND. This is predominantly as a result of delayed assessments of needs, how agencies manage waiting lists, and/or discontinuity of support provided due to delayed or incomplete transfer of information, variable availability of support in different areas, and/or the absence of processes to provide access to equivalent support without further assessments. For Service children with SEND arriving from overseas, the lack of recognition and use of SCAN documents by receiving local authorities and other providers presents an additional barrier to receiving timely and effective support.

Patterns of mobility vary between Services, with British Army cohorts most likely to experience multiple relocations. Additional factors also need to be considered in order to understand the impact of mobility on SEND needs. There may be specific experiences related to different Services, variations in cohort characteristics, geographical variables, or other variables that affect the experiences of schools with Service children with SEND on roll, and will interact with their experience of mobility.

### 5.1.3 Distinctive Needs of Service Children with SEND

Service children with SEND may have distinctive needs based on their experiences of Service life. Those most commonly identified are:

- Co-occurring Emotional or Mental Health needs, which may be a result of family separation or trauma;
- Co-occurring Attachment or Social Interaction needs, which may be a result of mobility or family separation, e.g. during a parent's deployment.

These needs are not necessarily unique to Service children with SEND, and are not experienced by all Service children with SEND, but do indicate a higher frequency of experiences and impacts than for the overall cohort of pupils with SEND. Practitioners should be aware of and responsive to this elevated risk.

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It is also notable that the overall proportion of Service children with SEND identified in our sample is somewhat lower than the national average of pupils in England receiving SEN support or who have an EHCP. This may indicate an element of under-recognised support needs, a conclusion that is supported by the frequent reports of delays in identification and assessment of SEN needs among Service children, in particular those resulting from mobility. However, figures do vary between the main Service representation. Further research would need to be undertaken before concluding that there are differences in the frequency of SEND needs and/or gaps in assessment between Service cohorts; and if there are differences to understand the nature and causes of these differences.

#### 5.1.4 Awareness of Needs- Schools

Respondents from schools with smaller numbers of Service children are less likely to identify Service children with SEND as having distinctive needs relative to other pupils with SEND. It is plausible to conclude that, at least in some cases, schools with low numbers of Service children lack the support and resources to fully meet the needs of this cohort. As these impacts are generally a subtle variation on the wider impact of moving schools and/or family separation and/or trauma experienced by other groups, it is likely that this nuance is not fully understood by practitioners with limited or no experience of Service family life.

Some respondents, in particular from schools with small Service child cohorts, gave assertive statements about providing equal responses to all pupils with SEND, and so not treating any subgroups, including Service children, differently from other groups. Although a commitment to treat all SEND pupils equally is laudable, it can only be delivered effectively if there is an equal understanding of each cohort's circumstances and experiences. Those designing and delivering support need to be fully aware of and responsive to the experiences of Service children and the impacts these can have on the needs of a Service child with SEND, if that support is to have an equitable impact. It is not clear if the majority of SEND staff working in local authorities or staff in schools with low numbers of Service children have sufficient awareness of the specific impacts of Service life on Service children with SEND to ensure equitable access to appropriately tailored support. There would appear to be an opportunity to develop information banks and/or CPD opportunities to address this potential gap.

#### 5.1.5 Awareness of Needs and the Armed Forces Covenant- Support Agencies

A majority of respondents expressed the view that the awareness and understanding of local authority SEND practitioners and NHS staff regarding Service children appears to be low overall. Despite the majority of respondents being from areas with high numbers of Service children, most reported a poor awareness among local agencies of the particular disadvantages and challenges experienced by Service children, and a lack of flexibility to ensure equitable access to support, in particular with relation to mobility.

The Armed Forces Covenant provides statutory guidance to local authorities and the NHS that encourages flexibility to enable part-completed assessments and waiting list positions to in effect be ported between areas. Some Service families are reported to interpret this guidance more strongly, viewing it more as a right or expectation than the 'suggestion' (carrying limited legal weight) that it actually is. This results in families being disappointed and frustrated when the guidance is ignored.

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Nevertheless, there appears to be widespread ignorance of this guidance among local authority SEND practitioners and NHS providers, and/or local systems that do not accommodate the required flexibilities to put this guidance into practice. In some cases, there is even some apparent hostility towards the concept that Service children who have moved areas should be able to enter a waiting list anywhere other than at the bottom. The statutory guidance of the Armed Forces Covenant does not seek priority for Service children, but equity. The experience of the majority of respondents to this questionnaire suggests that the current systems, practice and culture of many local authority SEND practitioners and NHS providers are a significant barrier to equity being achieved.

#### 5.1.6 General SEND Pressures

It is clear that SEND services in general are under considerable pressure. There are clearly pockets of good practice, with some respondents viewing their local authority SEND teams to be providing good support despite limited resources. However, there are some areas where SEND services would appear to be viewed as inadequate for all pupils with SEND. It is important to recognise that for strategies and priorities to improve the experiences of Service children with SEND to be effective, they must take account of the wider context of SEND services, and the challenges they face.

#### 5.1.7 Positive Messages

Despite the focus of many respondents on the gaps and challenges experienced when supporting Service children with SEND, it is important to note things are going well for some Service children with SEND. Typically this is linked to schools using funds and other resources over and above Service Pupil Premium allocations to provide targeted support for these children. Key enabling factors for successful support are:

- **Specialist in-school support**, such as pastoral support, individualised support plans, and dedicated time with a SENCo. In schools with larger numbers of Service children, combining this specialist SEND support with pastoral support focussed specifically on Service children appears to be particularly effective;
- **Communication with parents** to anticipate changes in circumstances and provide additional resources/ support at times of additional challenge, such as during a deployment of the serving parent. Partnerships with forces welfare and chaplaincy services appear to be particularly effective where available;
- **Access to specialist therapeutic activities or resources**, often in partnership with other schools, and informed by the impacts of Service life;
- **Having a settled environment with consistent support**. Even where a Service child with SEND experiences frequent moves, some schools have effective measures in place to ease transition and enable a new arrival to settle quickly, such as having a named member of staff who coordinates support and is in frequent contact with the family for the first few weeks after arriving;
- There are several **charities providing high quality resources** and other support that is highly valued by schools. These typically focus on either SEND needs or the experiences of Service children, but schools are able to combine these resources to good effect.

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## 5.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggestions for further work to explore the main findings in more depth, and identify practicable responses to the main conclusions:

- **Developing Processes and Resources to Ease Transition**

It is recommended options are explored for developing processes and resources to ease transition for Service children with SEND between schools, in particular moves into a new local authority area arising from mobility. The case for portable SEND assessments is strong, and would have benefits for all pupils with SEND, not just Service children. Identifying and implementing workable practices or processes that would ease the transition of Service children with SEND has potential to have a significant positive impact for Service children with SEND, and for schools.
- **Promoting Awareness and Monitoring the Impact of the Armed Forces Covenant**

There would be value in further investigating the awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant among local authority SEND practitioners and health providers, and the impact this has on practice. It is also recommended to explore options for strengthening the impact of the Armed Forces Covenant in relation to ensuring equitable access to SEND and health services for Service children, e.g. by establishing a nationally recognised advice or mediation service that provides support to schools or families who do not believe that appropriate consideration has been given to specific disadvantages experienced by a Service child.
- **Enabling More Consistent Positive Communication with Armed Forces Units**

There are some excellent examples of Armed Forces Units working closely with schools to enhance the support provided to Service children with SEND and their families, and use of chaplains to provide a trusted link between a unit, school and family. However, this typically appears to depend on specific individuals, and is generally restricted to schools with high numbers of Service children. It would be beneficial to identify ways to encourage Armed Forces units to improve communication and partnership with local schools, in particular those schools with fewer Service children on roll. Although an issue of relevance for all Service children, such improvements in the coordination of holistic support for Service families offer particularly strong benefits for Service children with SEND.
- **Guidance for Linking SEND Support and Pastoral Support for Service Children**

It is recommended that options are explored for local authorities and/or schools to make links between their SEND support and pastoral support for Service children, so that SEND support is fully informed by the Service child experience. In schools with small numbers of Service children, there is likely to be less understanding of the potential impact of Service life and how this may affect SEND needs. There would be benefits in establishing a freely available resource bank to support work with Service children with SEND.
- **Training to Raise Awareness of the Specific Needs of Service Children with SEND**

There appears to be widespread gaps in understanding of the particular challenges experienced by Service children with SEND among key practitioners supporting this cohort. There would be benefits in developing relevant training tailored for:

  - School staff in those schools with low numbers of Service children;
  - Local authority SEND practitioners;
  - Providers of health, family wellbeing and SEND support services;
  - Welfare officers from the MOD.

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## Appendix A – Quantitative Questionnaire Responses

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

***To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:***

- As a cohort, the support needs of my school's Service pupils with SEND are broadly similar to those of other pupils with SEND;
- My school has experienced more barriers or challenges accessing SEN support for Service pupils than those typically encountered accessing support for other SEND pupils;
- My school has experienced more barriers or challenges for Service pupils receiving an EHC plan than those typically encountered by other SEND pupils;
- The transition process for Service pupils with SEND from another school in the same LA area is typically smooth;
- The transition process for Service pupils with SEND from a different LA area in England is typically smooth;
- The transition process for Service pupils with SEND from another country (either within the UK or overseas) is typically smooth;
- The communication and support between my school and the LA for Service pupils with an EHCP is broadly similar to that for other pupils with SEND.

***Respondents were given a choice of six response options:***

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- N/A

### ***Subgroup Notes***

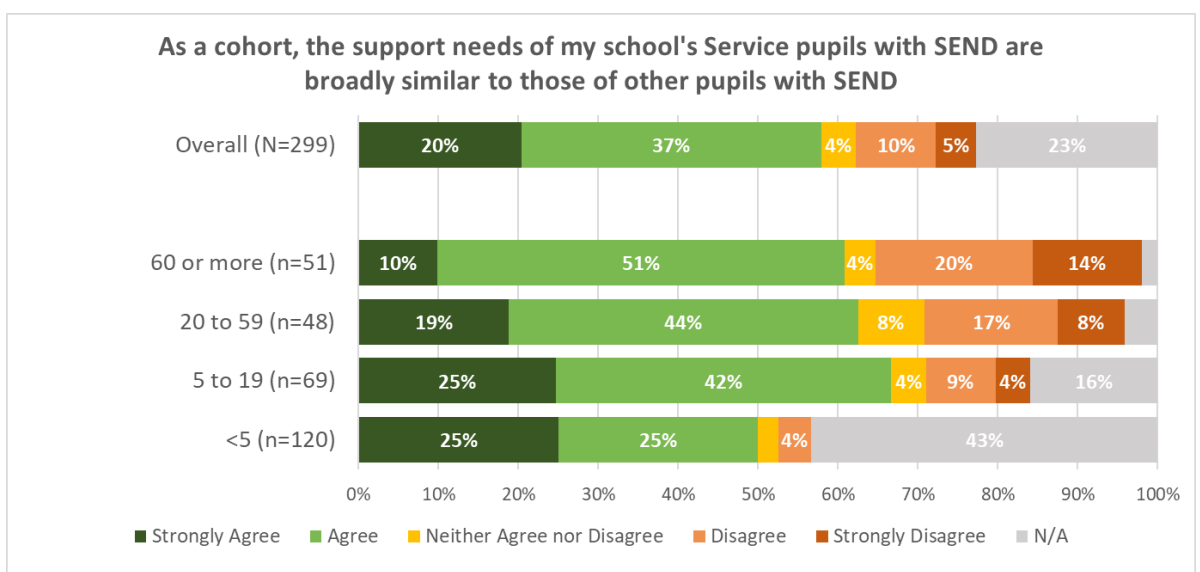
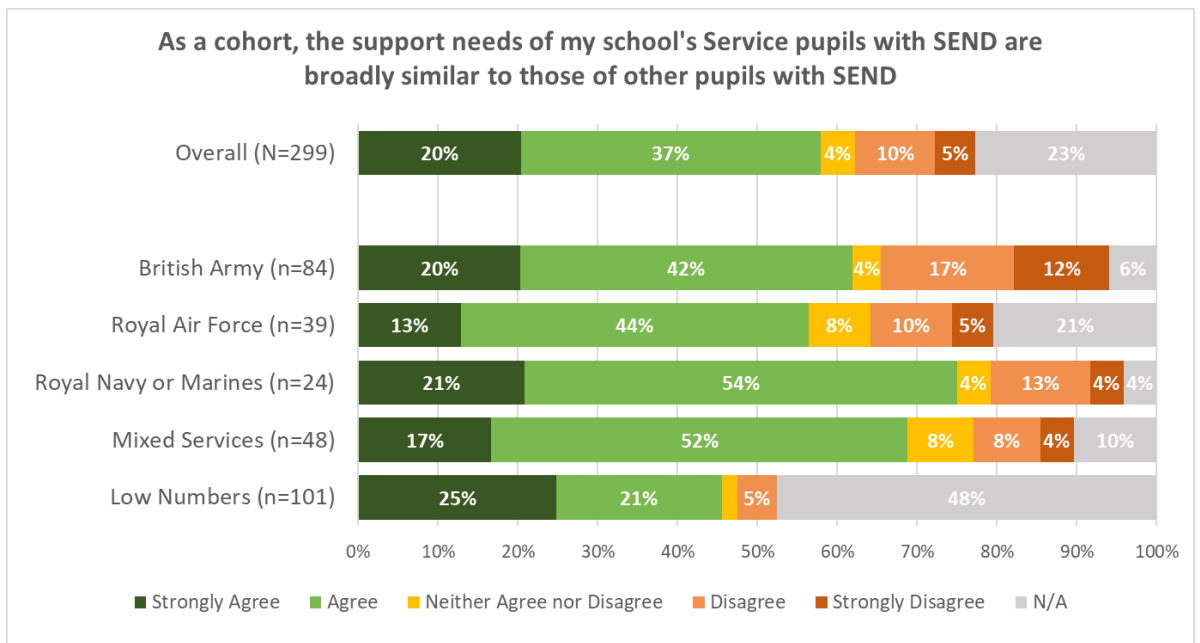
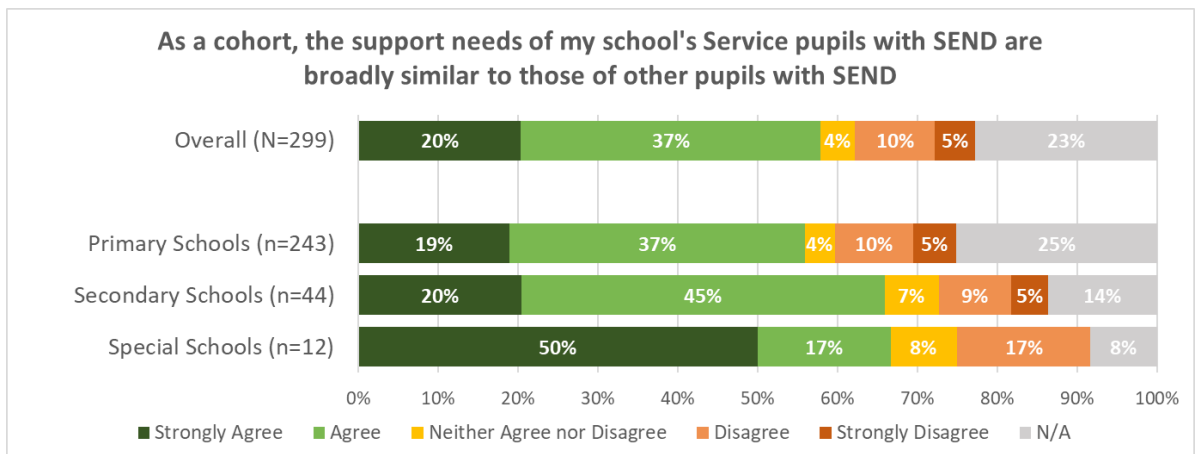
- **School Type**
  - 'Primary' includes 'nursery', 'infant', 'first', 'junior' and 'middle deemed primary' schools;
  - 'Secondary' includes 'middle deemed secondary', 'high' and 'all-through' schools.
- **Service**
  - Subgroups were created based on the Armed Forces Service in which the parents of the majority of a school's Service child cohort are serving or have served. Other Services may or may not be represented in these schools;
  - 'Mixed Services' are schools with a moderate proportion of Service children from two or more Services;

- 
- 'Low numbers' are schools with less than four Service children on roll, regardless of whether a single or multiple Services are represented within the cohort.
  - **Number of Service Children on Roll**
    - Allocations to subgroups based on actual or estimated numbers provided by respondents of Service children on roll as of 5th October 2023;
    - Unknowns are excluded;
    - Groupings are those used in the *Voice of Schools Survey Report* (2021).

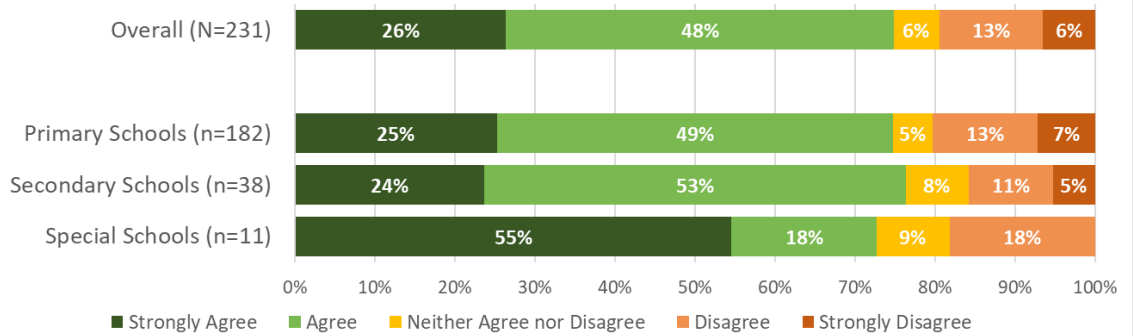
**Other Notes:**

- Reported percentages are rounded to the nearest integer, so may not sum to 100;
- Percentage values equal to or less than 3% are not labelled;
- Percentages relate to the stated subgroup sample size;
- Not all respondents could be allocated to a subgroup, and so subgroup numbers do not necessarily sum to the overall sample size. For each set of charts, all question responses are included in the overall figures, regardless of whether or not they are also included in one of the subgroups;
- Charts are provided both with 'N/A' responses included and not included. For the latter, reported percentages relate to the number of subgroup respondents who provided a response other than 'N/A'.

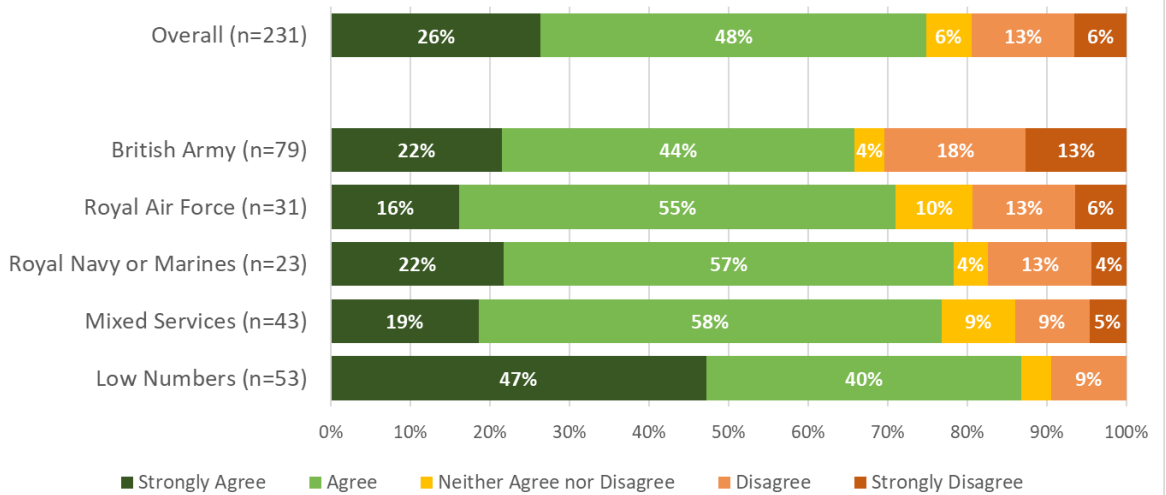
## A.1 Support Needs



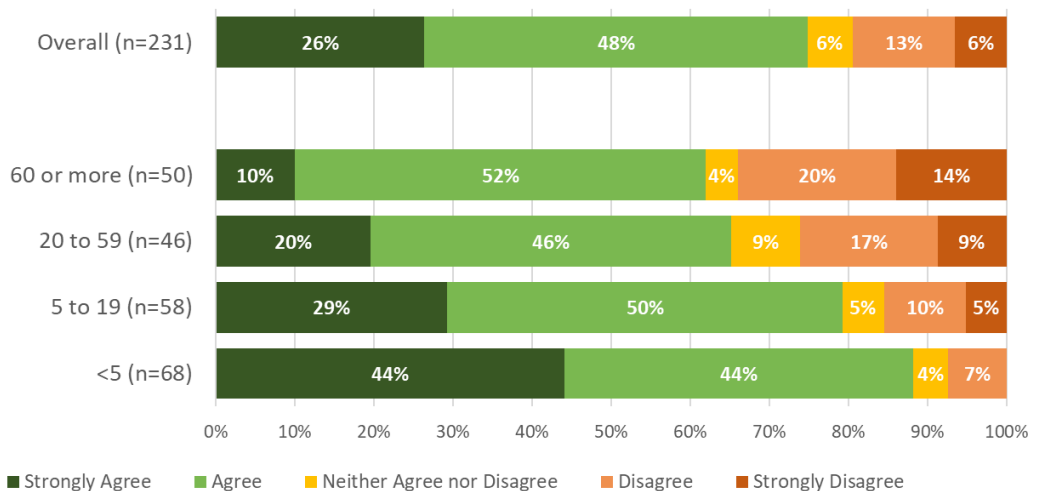
**As a cohort, the support needs of my school's Service pupils with SEND are broadly similar to those of other pupils with SEND (excluding N/A)**



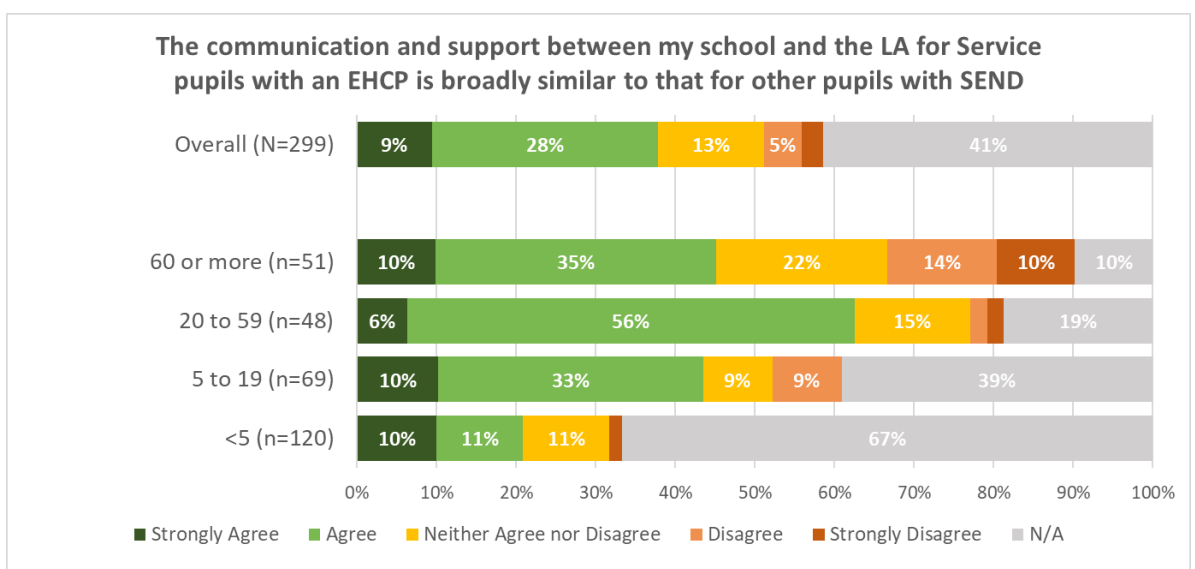
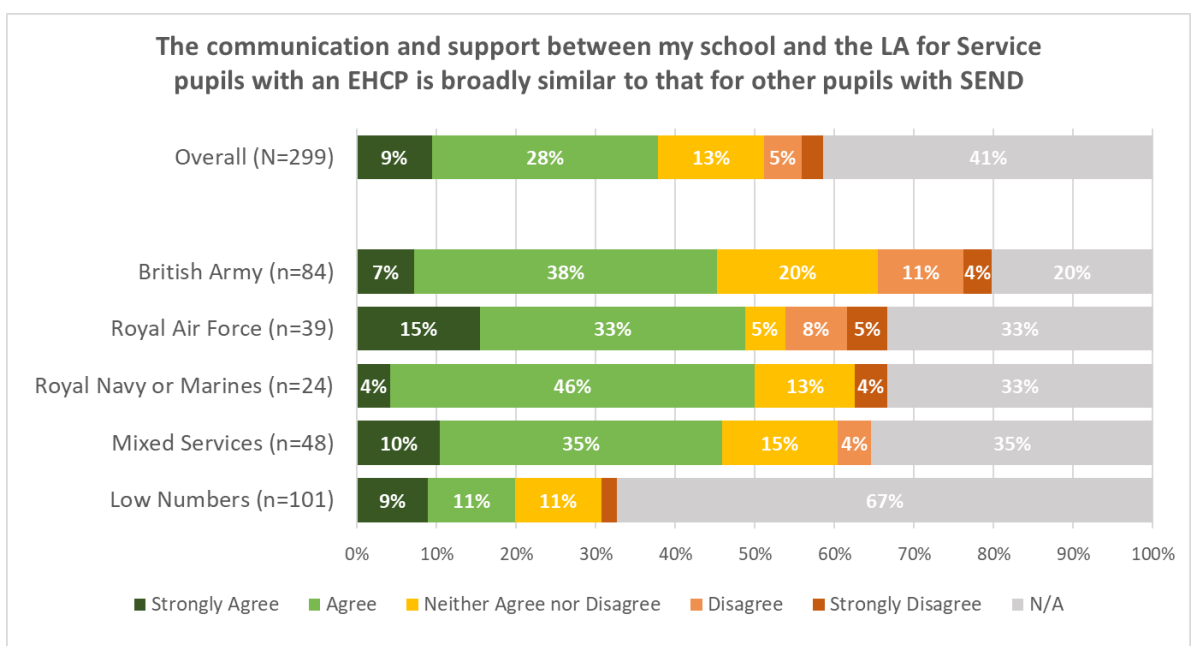
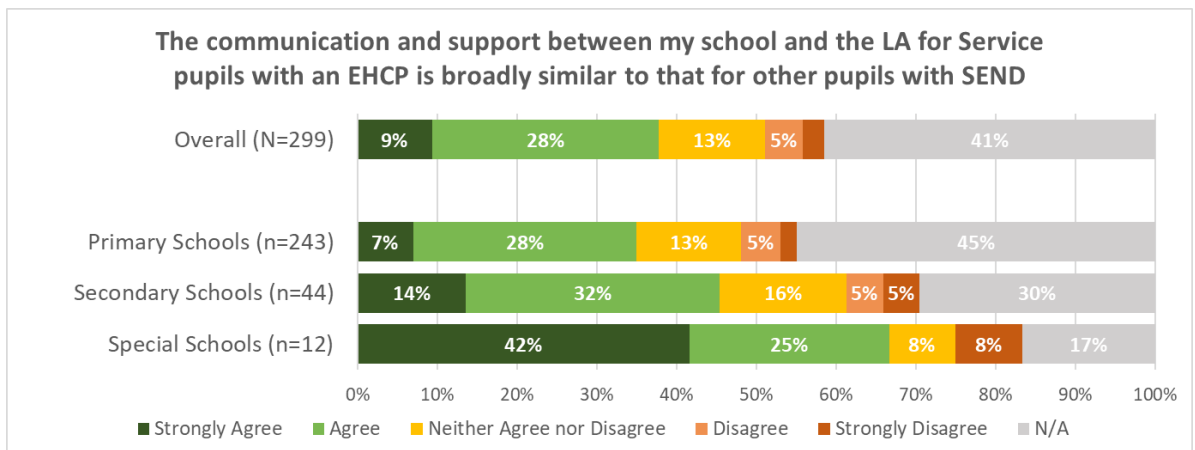
**As a cohort, the support needs of my school's Service pupils with SEND are broadly similar to those of other pupils with SEND (Excluding N/A)**



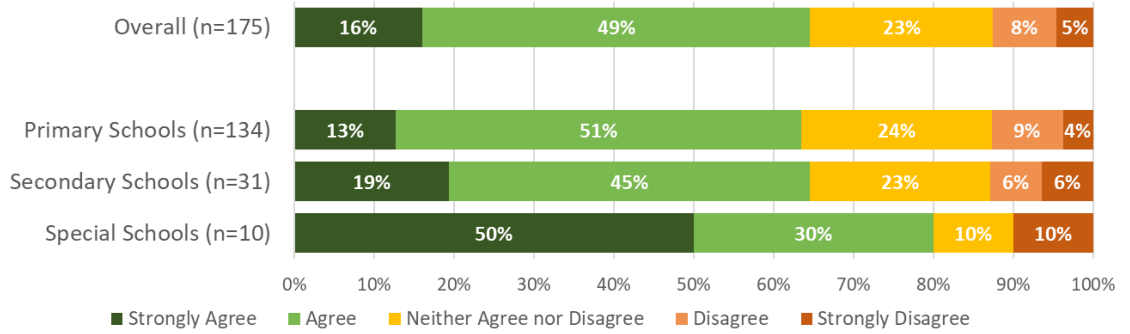
**As a cohort, the support needs of my school's Service pupils with SEND are broadly similar to those of other pupils with SEND (Excluding N/A)**



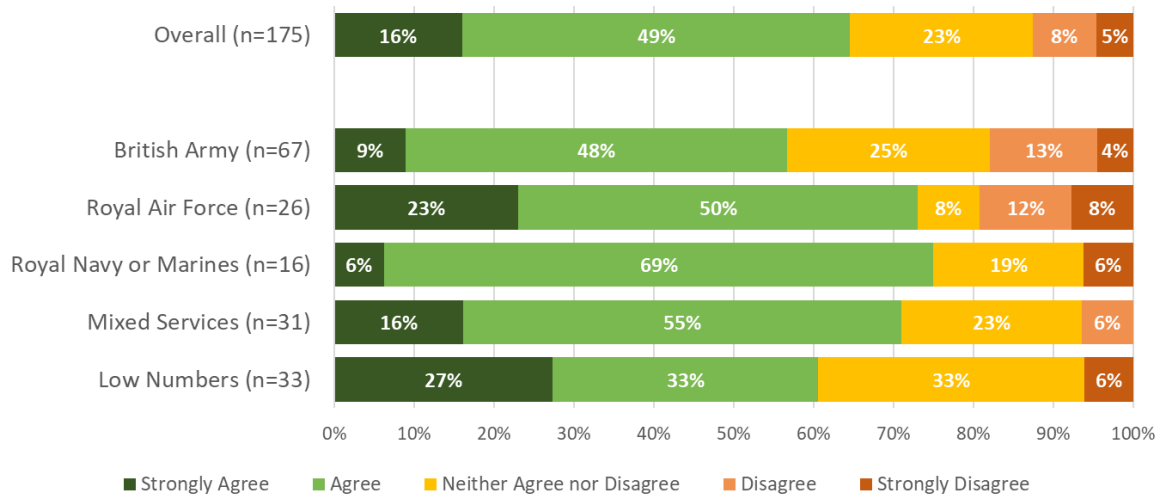
## A.2 Communication with Local Authorities



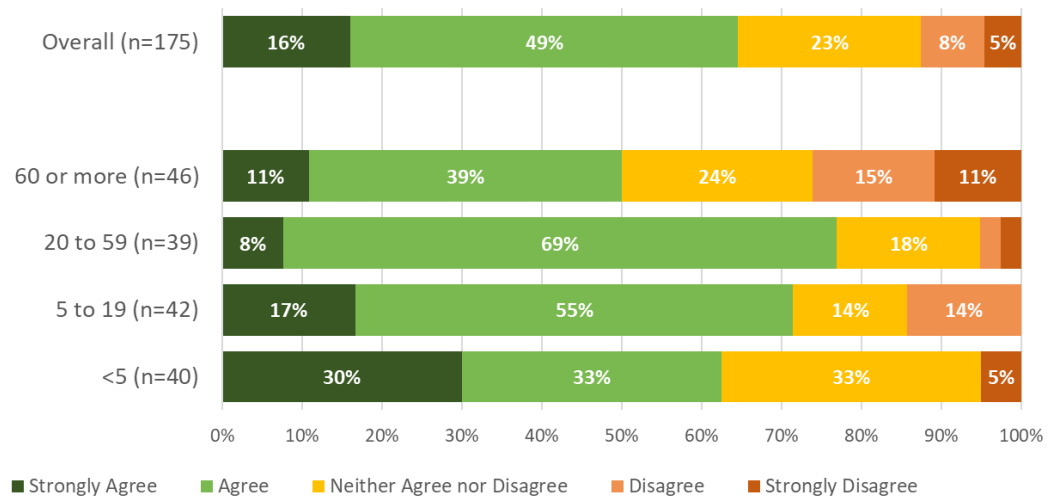
**The communication and support between my school and the LA for Service pupils with an EHCP is broadly similar to that for other pupils with SEND (excluding N/A)**



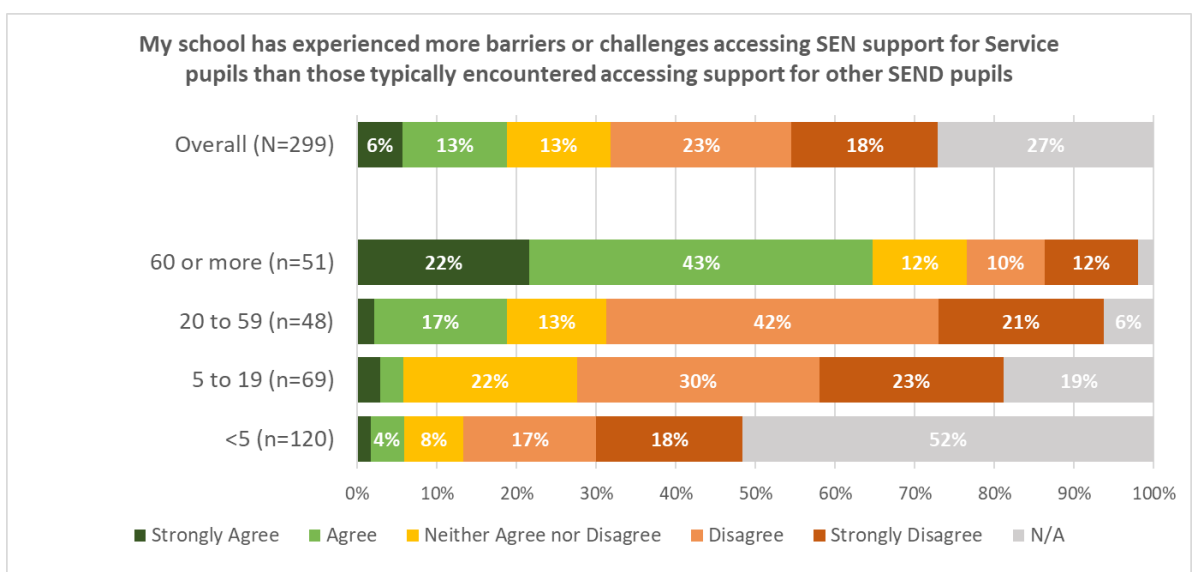
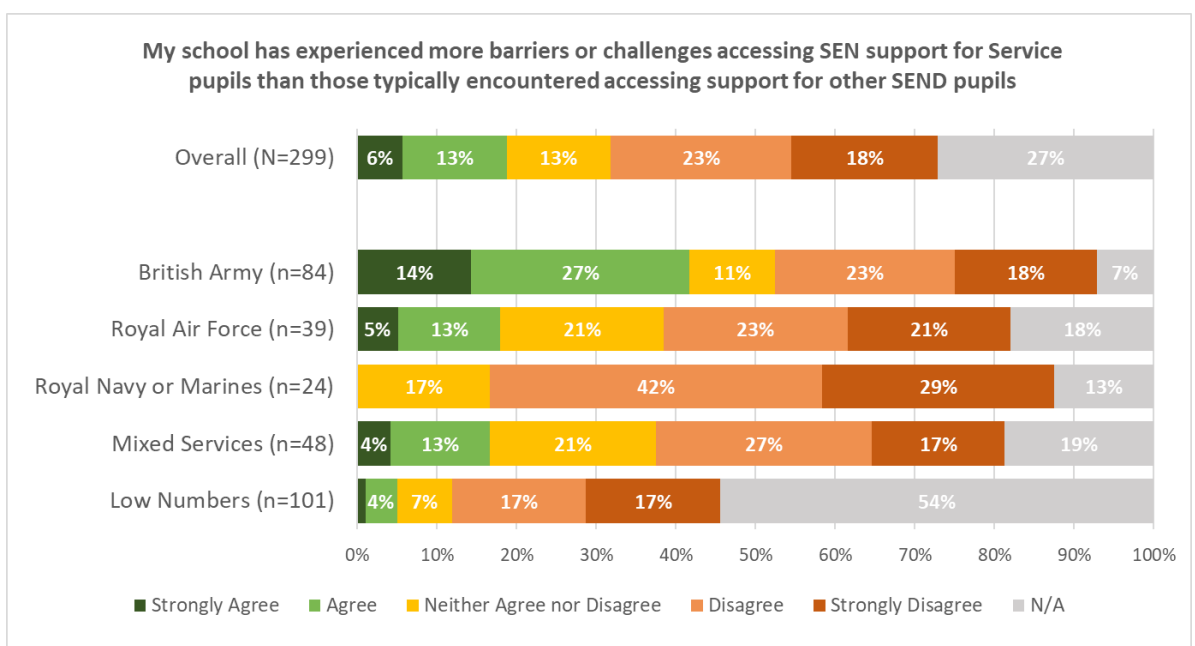
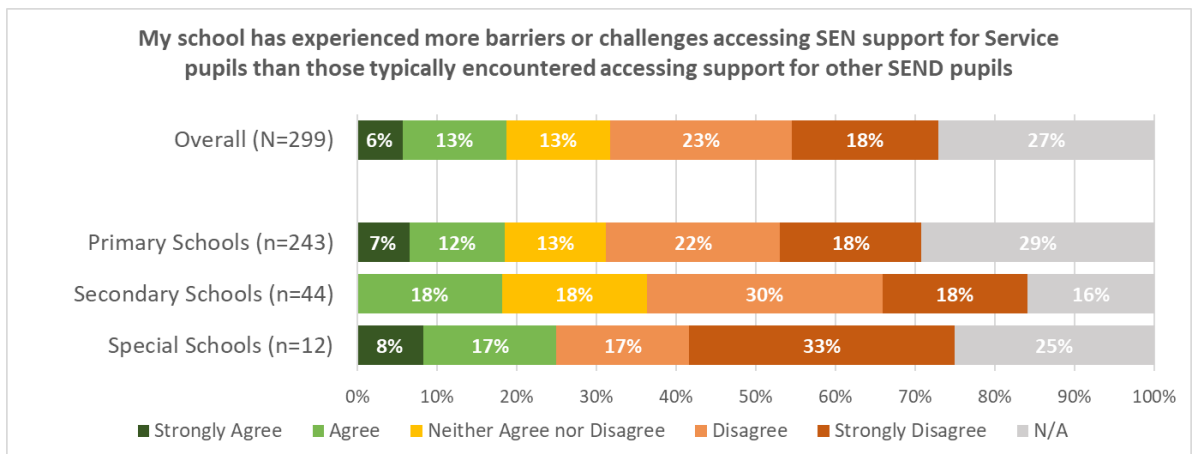
**The communication and support between my school and the LA for Service pupils with an EHCP is broadly similar to that for other pupils with SEND (Excluding N/A)**

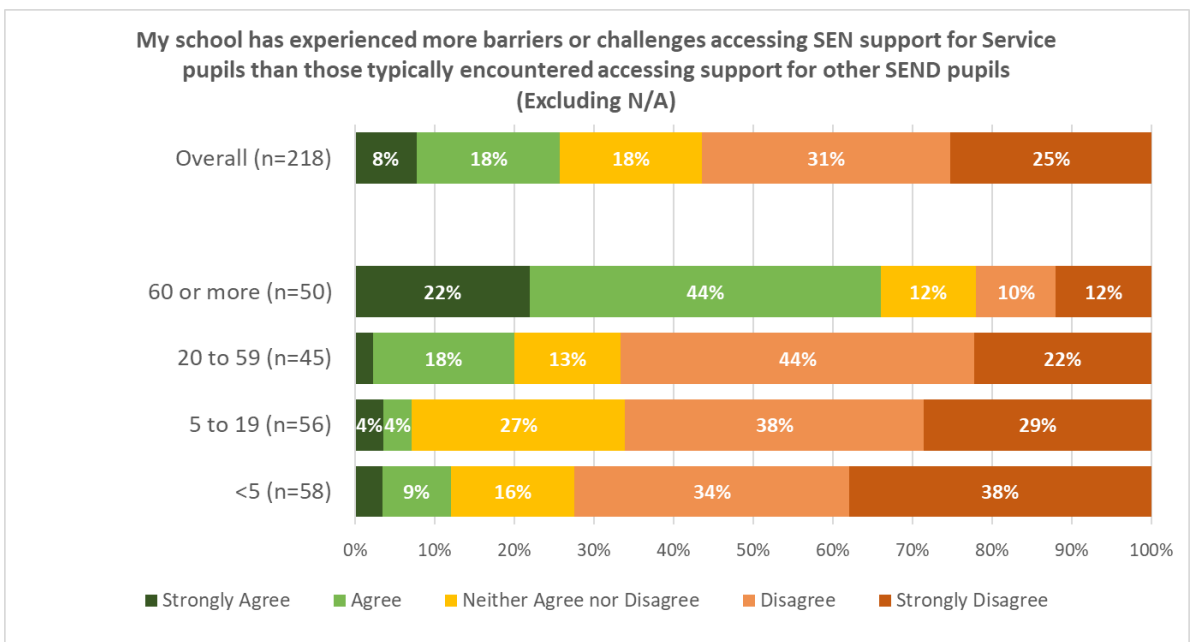
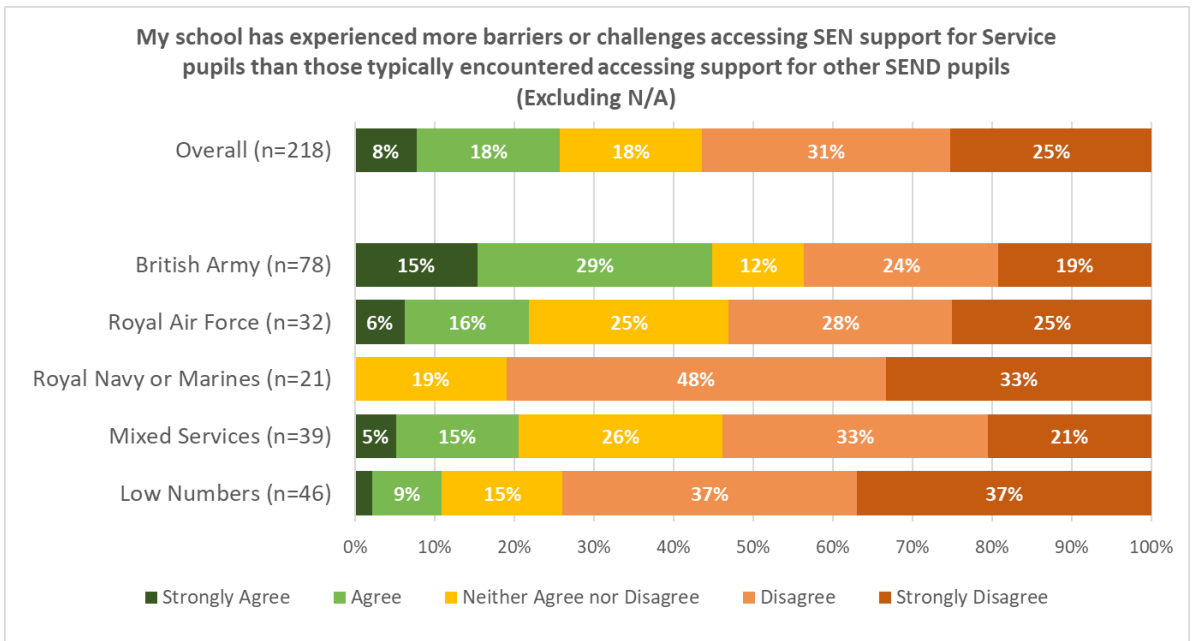
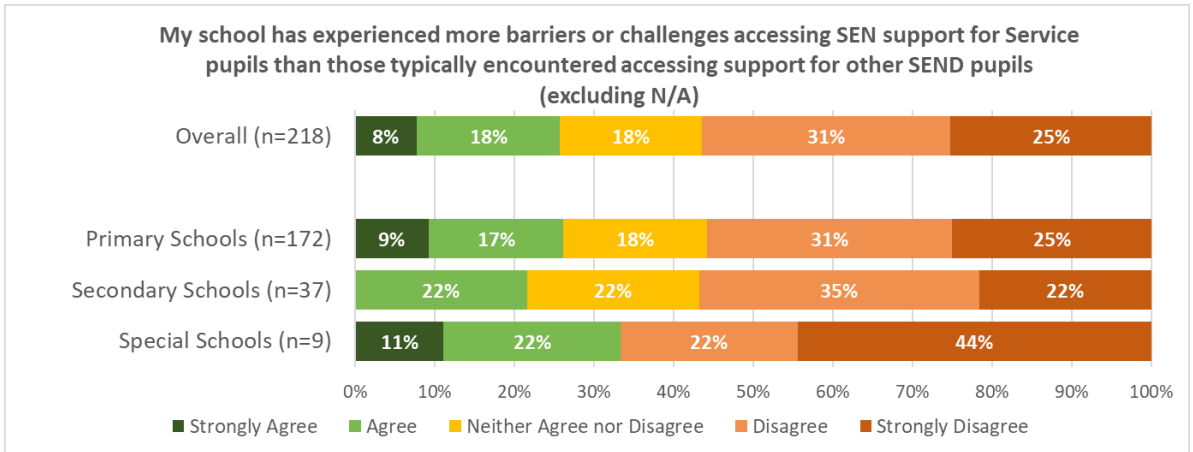


**The communication and support between my school and the LA for Service pupils with an EHCP is broadly similar to that for other pupils with SEND (Excluding N/A)**

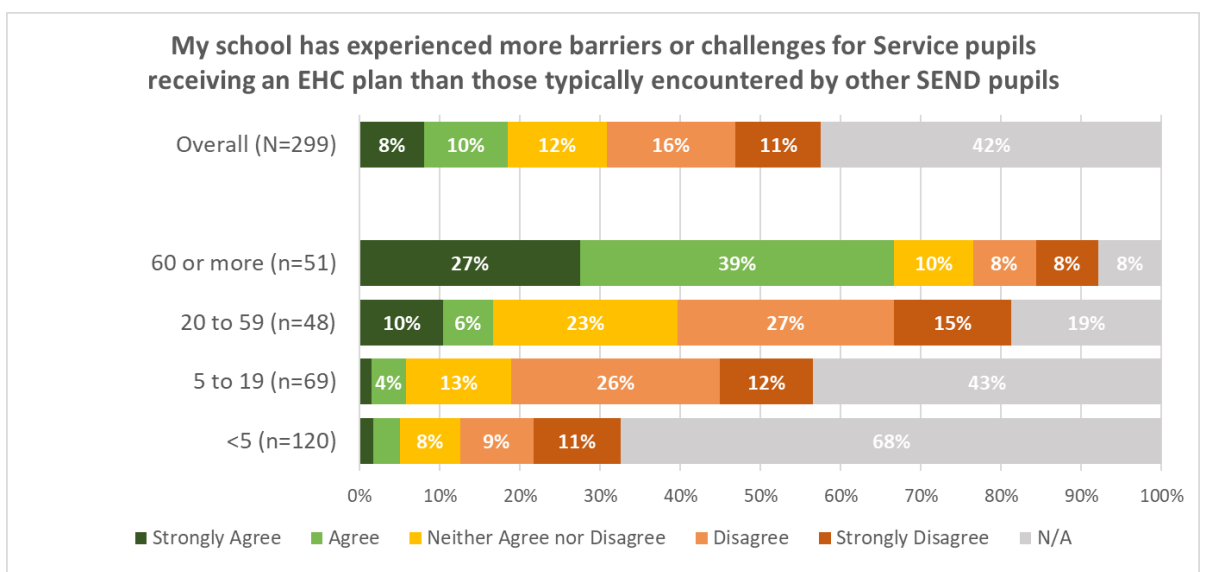
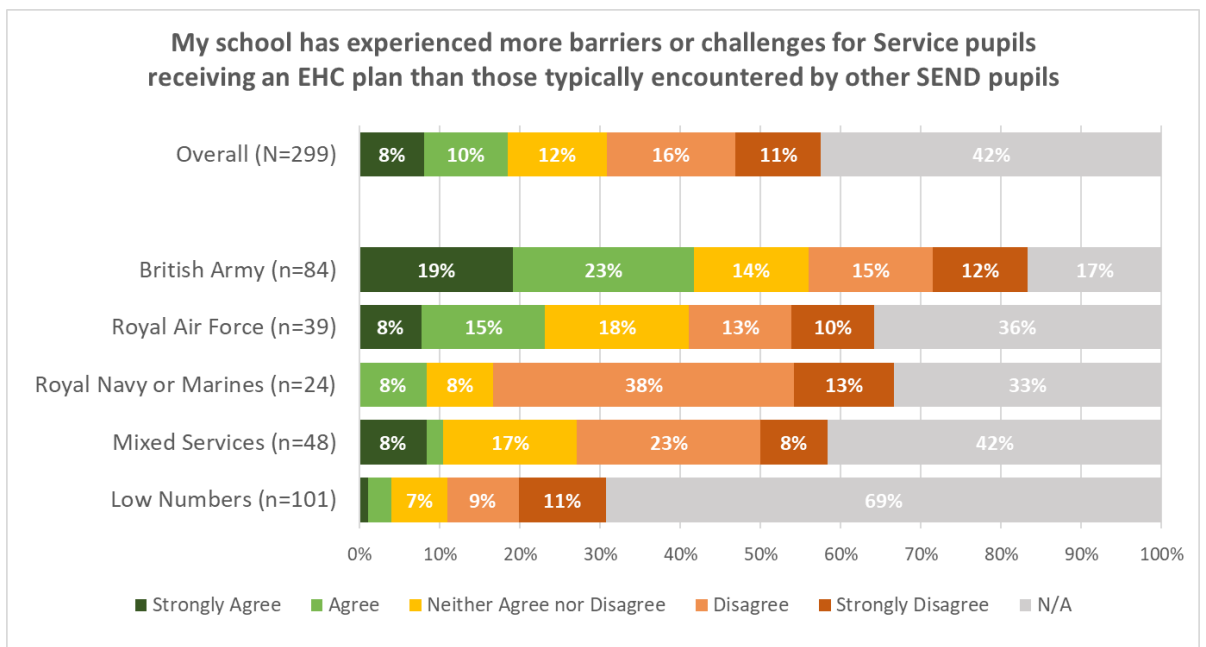
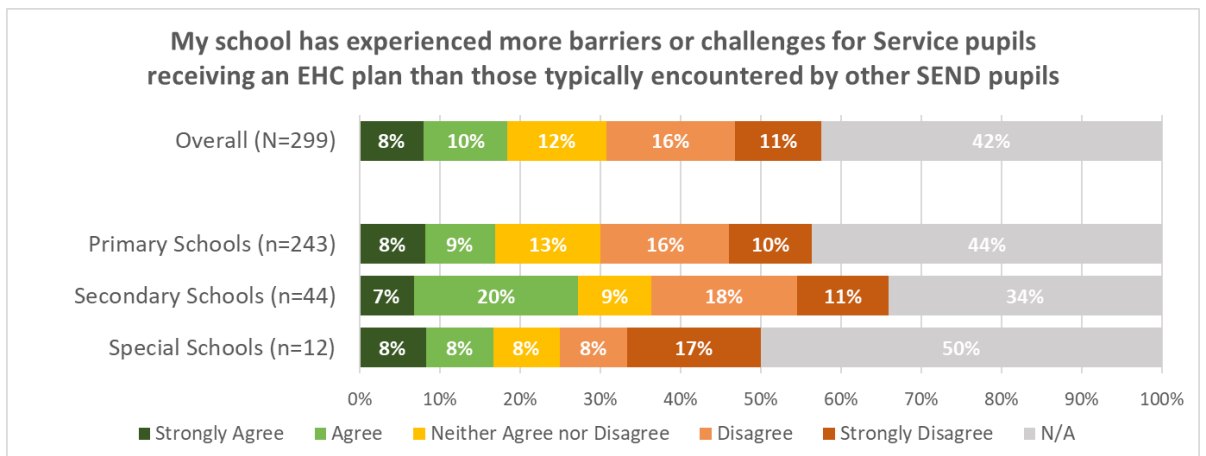


### A.3 Experiences Accessing SEN Support

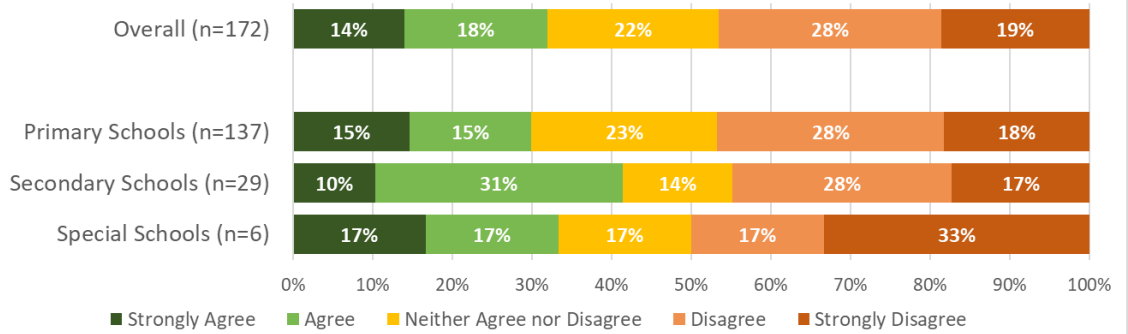




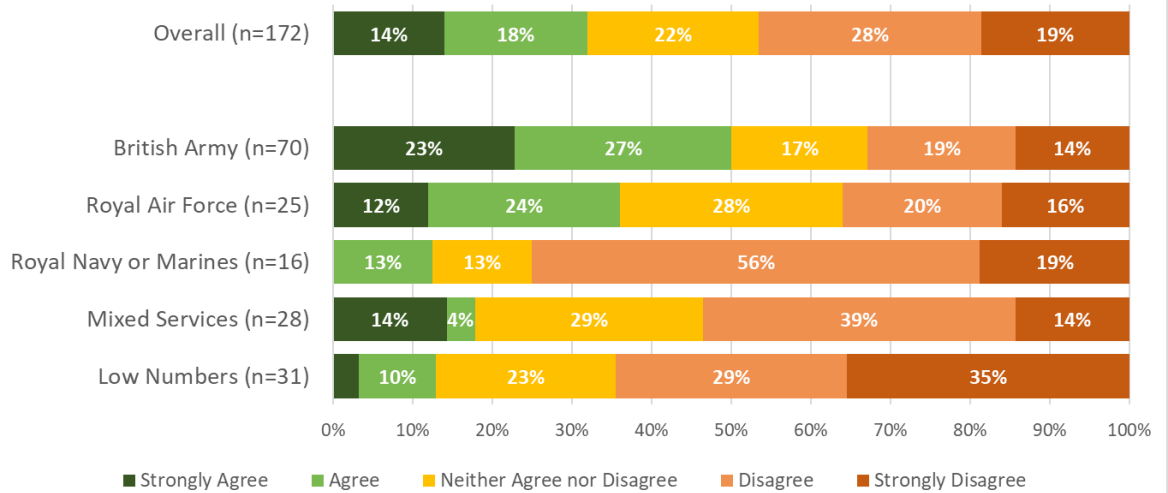
## A.4 Experiences of EHC Plans



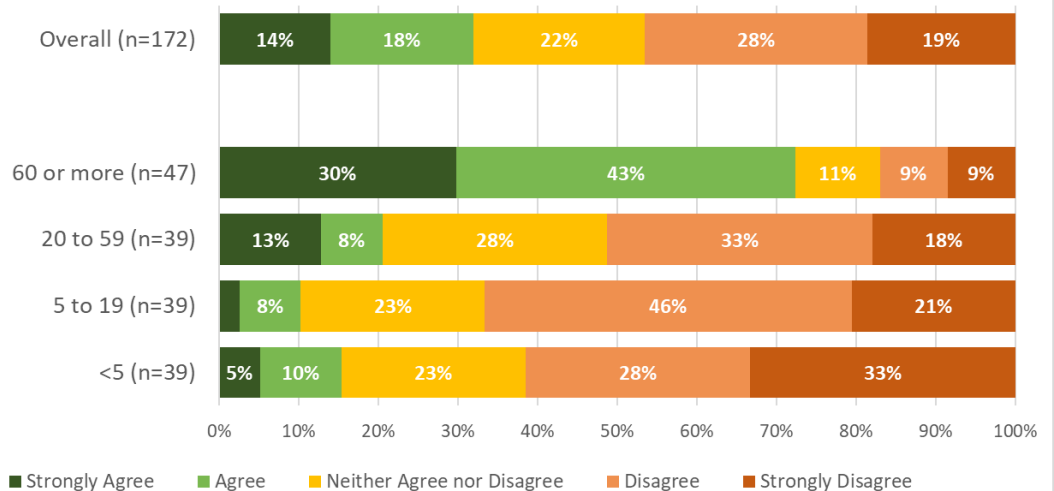
**My school has experienced more barriers or challenges for Service pupils receiving an EHC plan than those typically encountered by other SEND pupils (excluding N/A)**



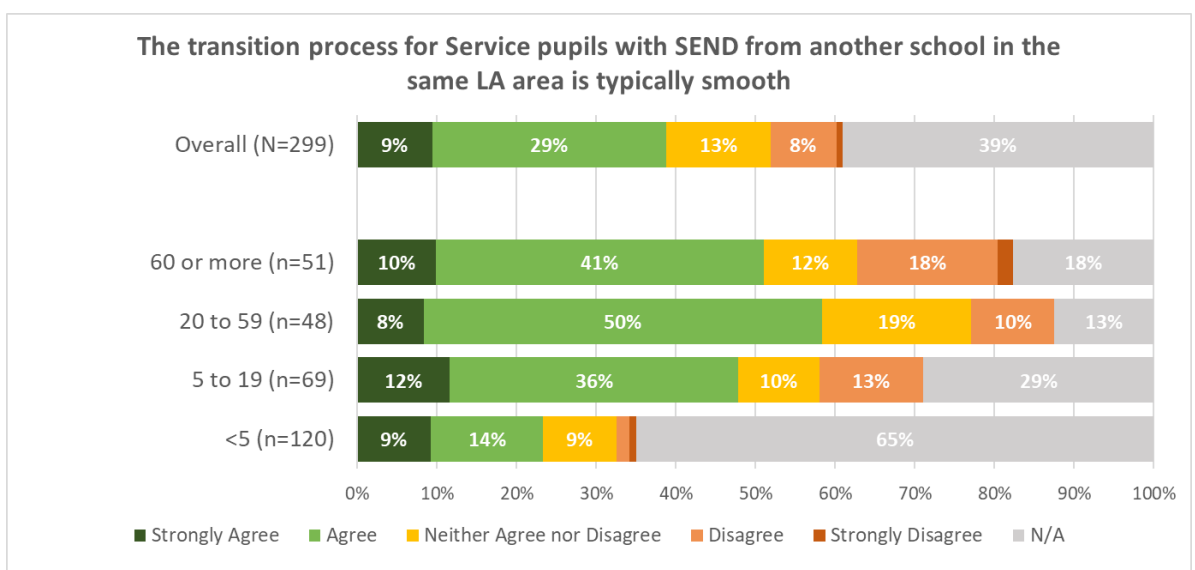
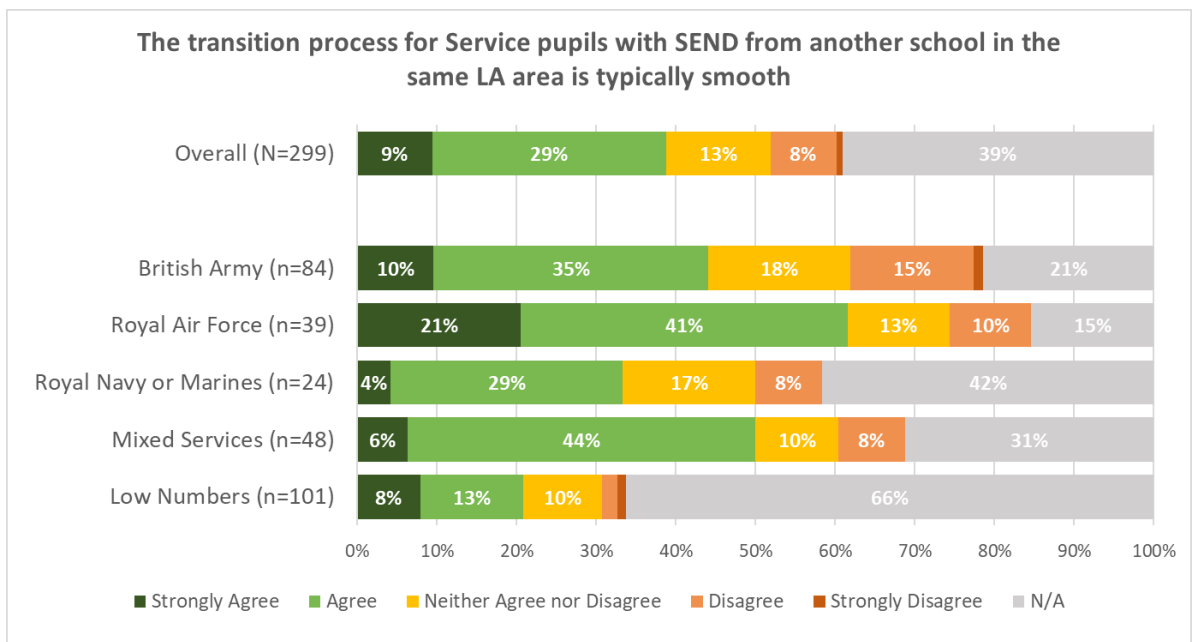
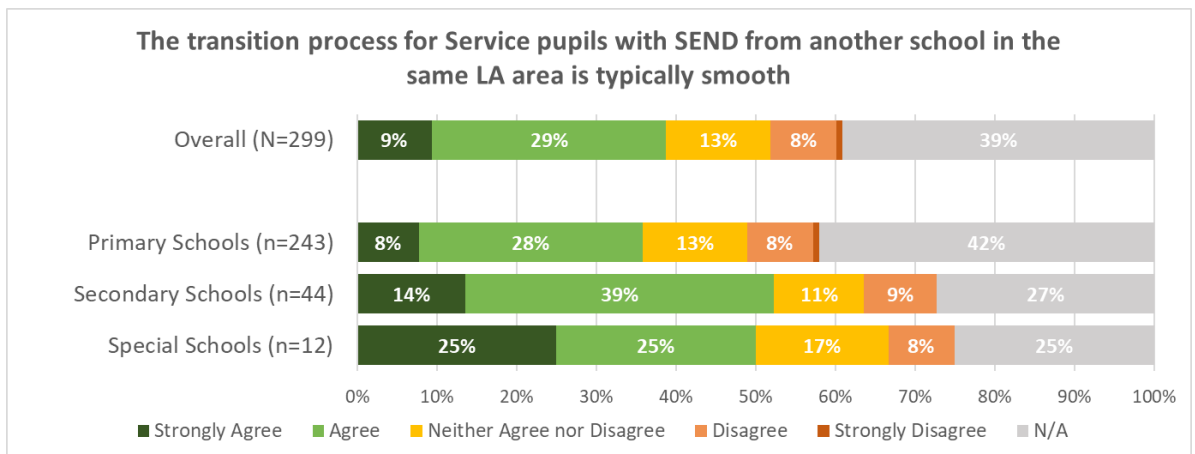
**My school has experienced more barriers or challenges for Service pupils receiving an EHC plan than those typically encountered by other SEND pupils (Excluding N/A)**



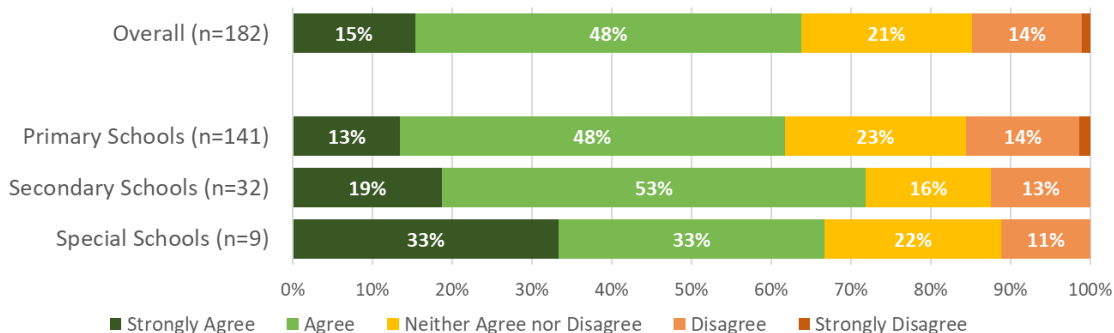
**My school has experienced more barriers or challenges for Service pupils receiving an EHC plan than those typically encountered by other SEND pupils (Excluding N/A)**



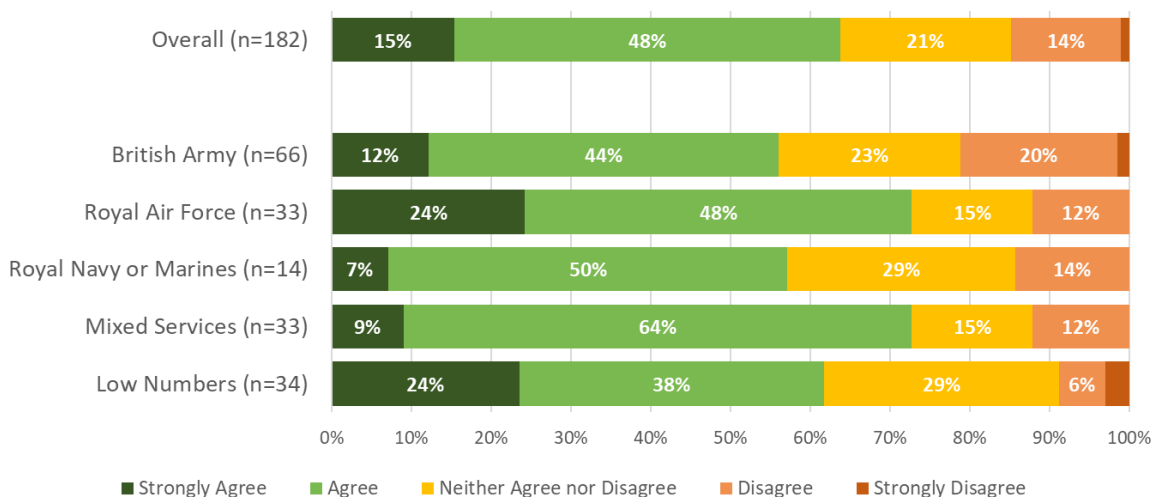
## A.5 Transition Within Local Authority Area



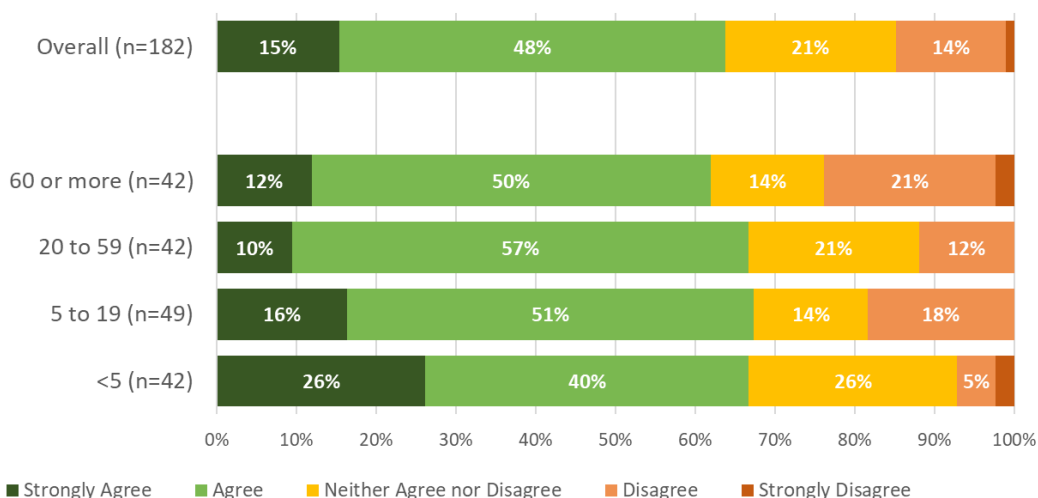
**The transition process for Service pupils with SEND from another school in the same LA area is typically smooth (excluding N/A)**



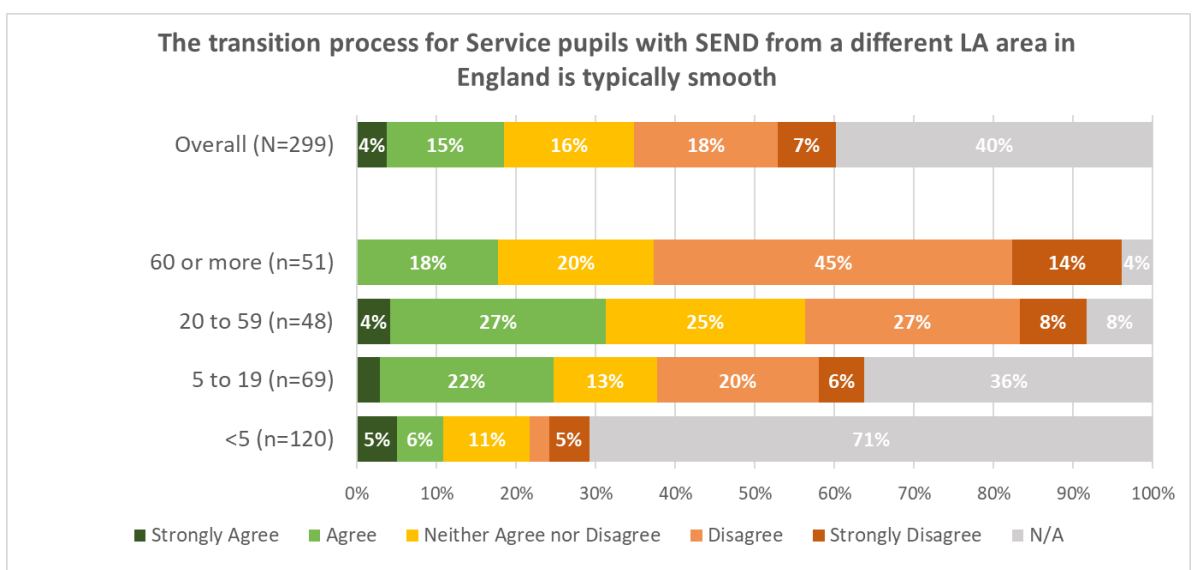
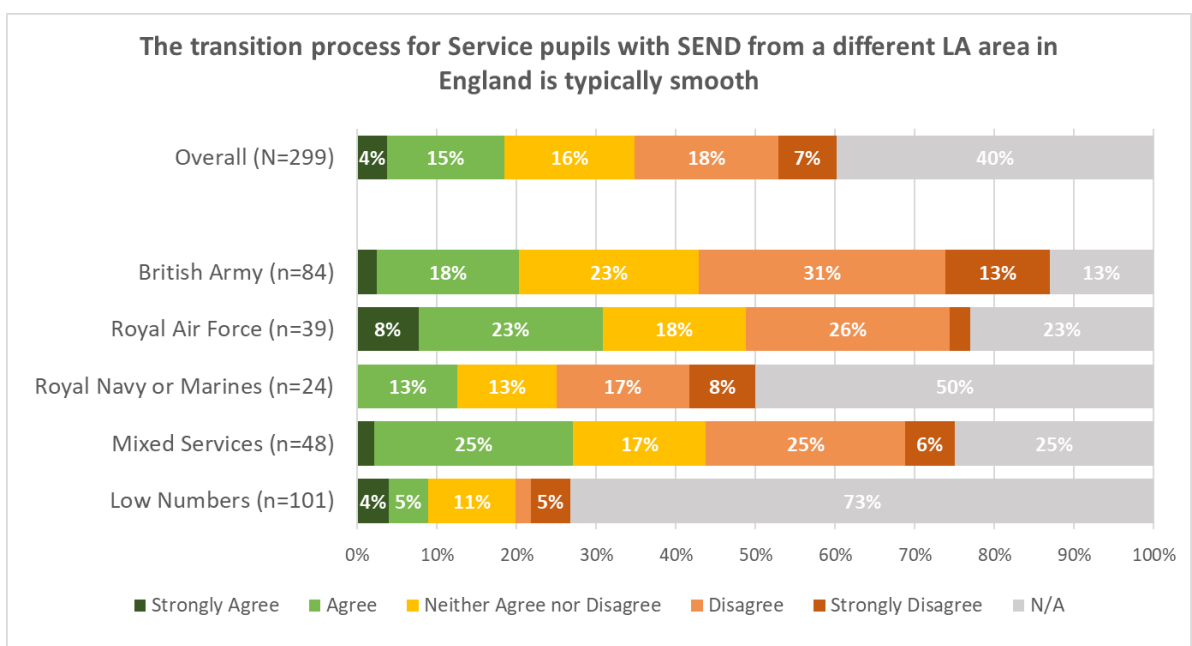
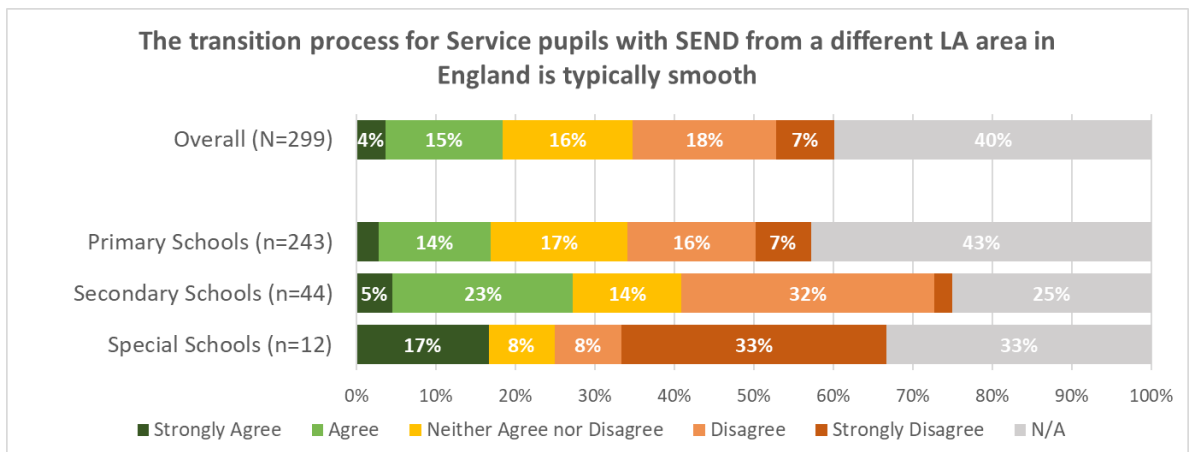
**The transition process for Service pupils with SEND from another school in the same LA area is typically smooth(Excluding N/A)**

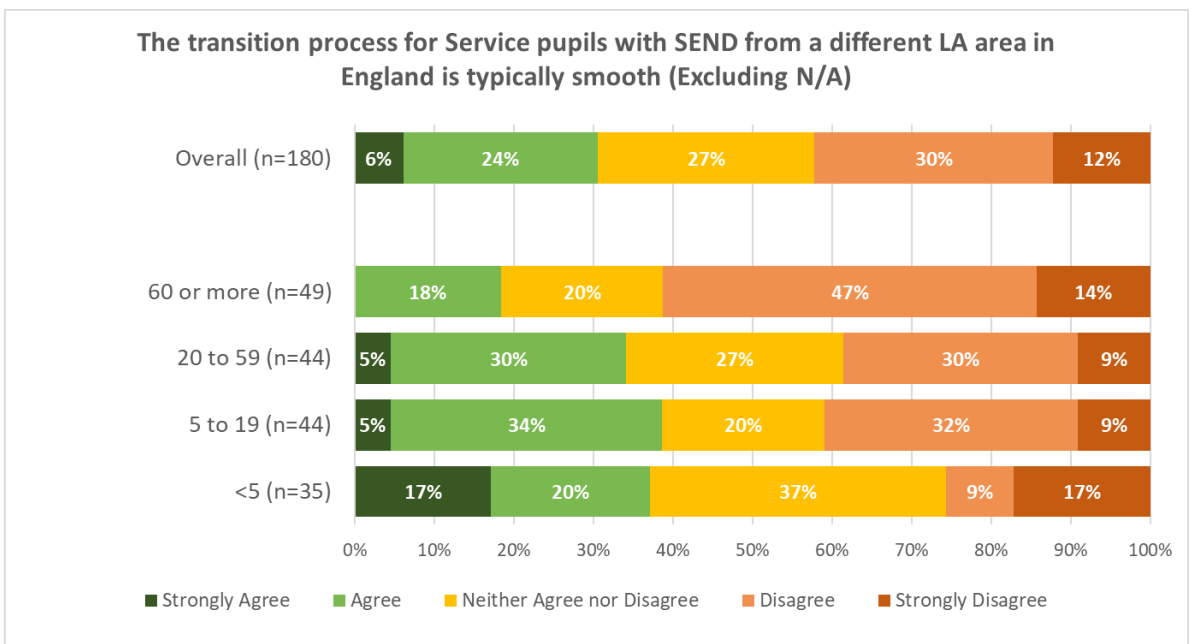
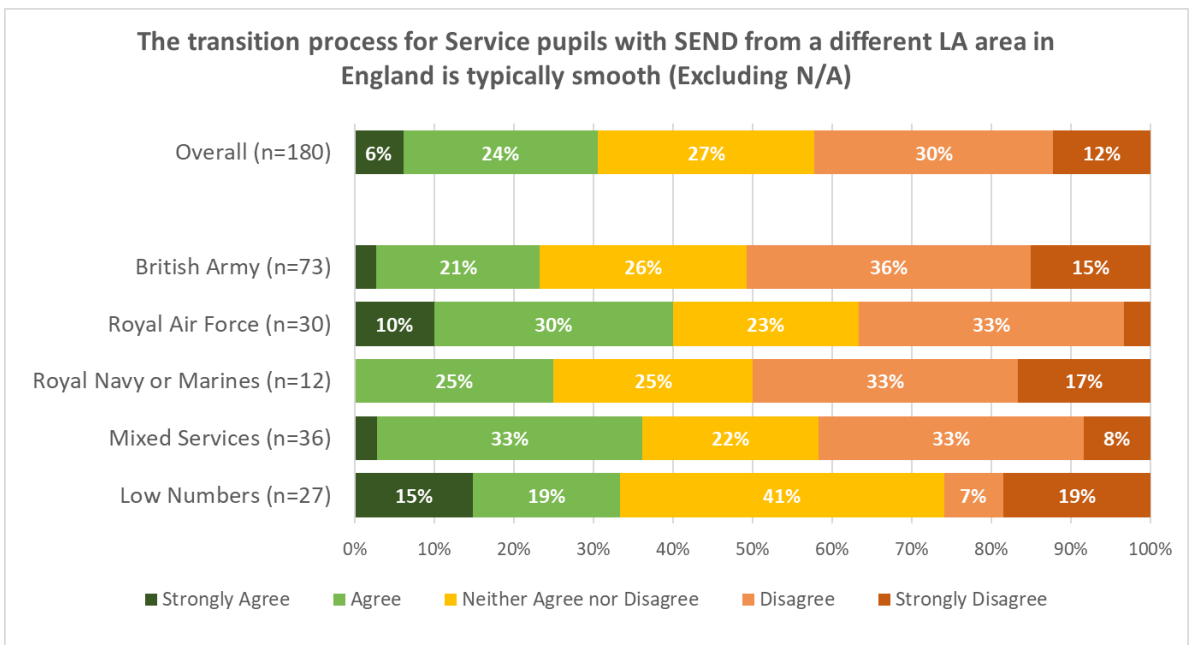
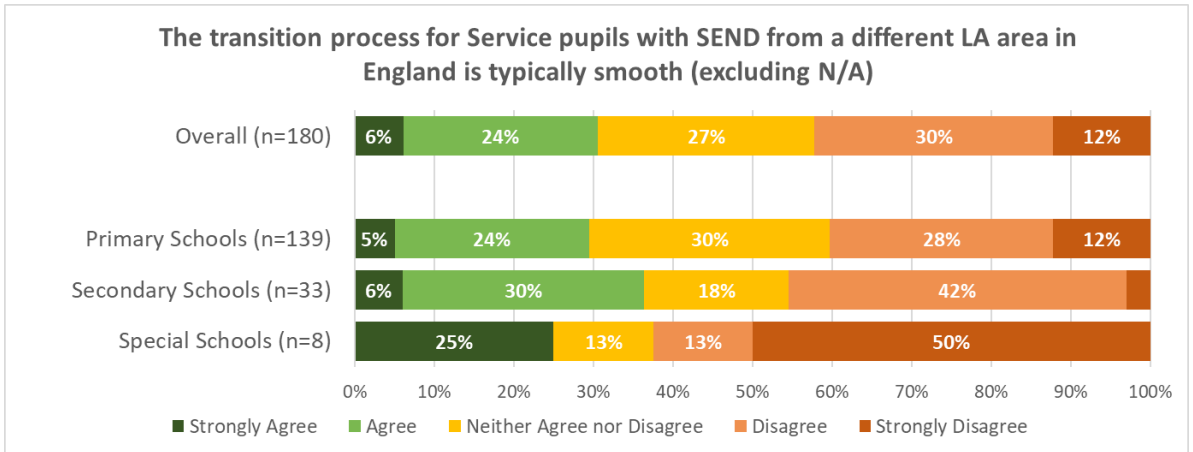


**The transition process for Service pupils with SEND from another school in the same LA area is typically smooth (Excluding N/A)**

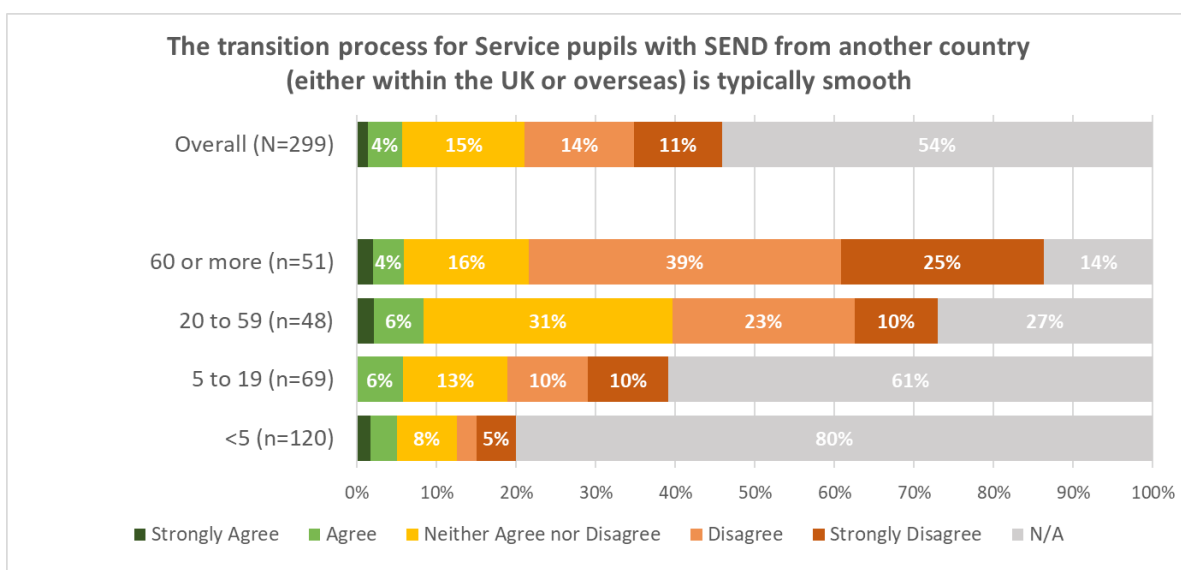
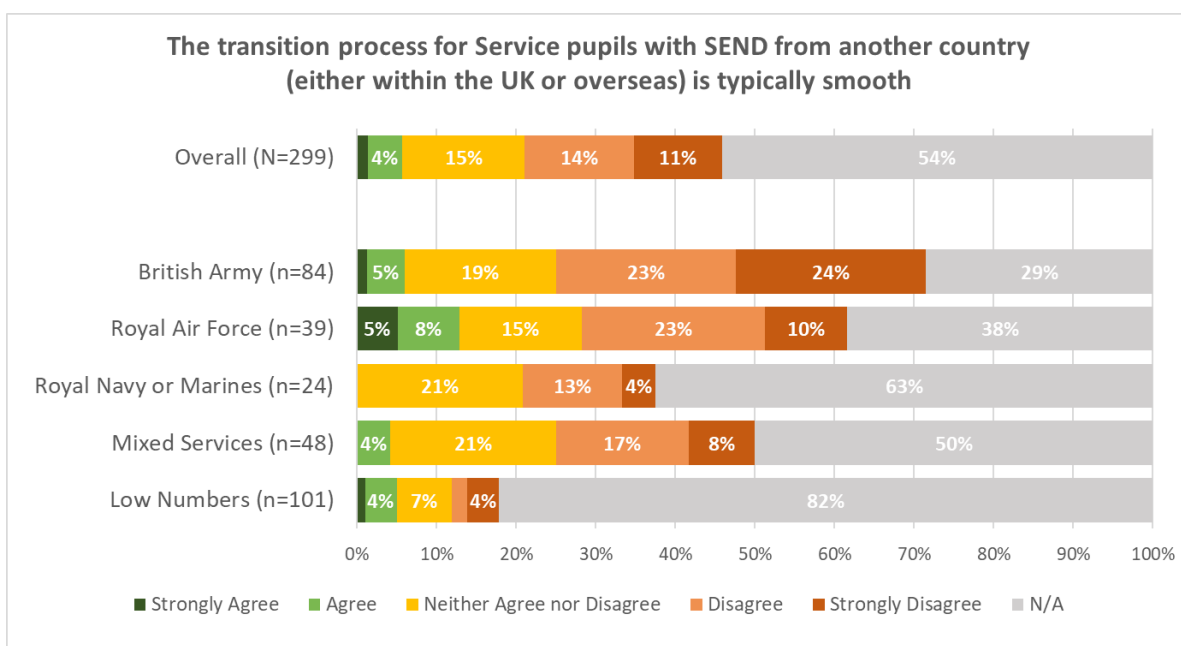
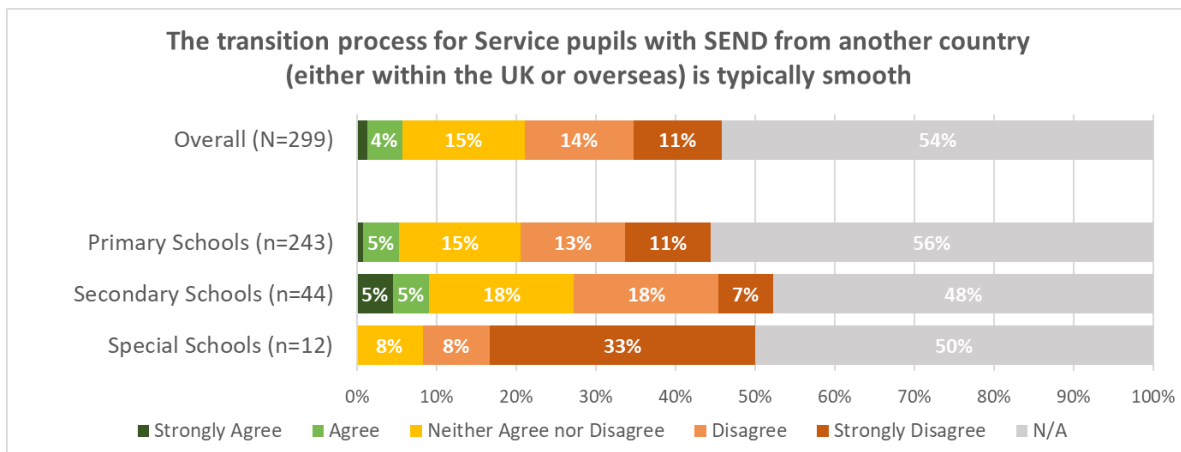


## A.6 Transition From A Different Local Authority Area

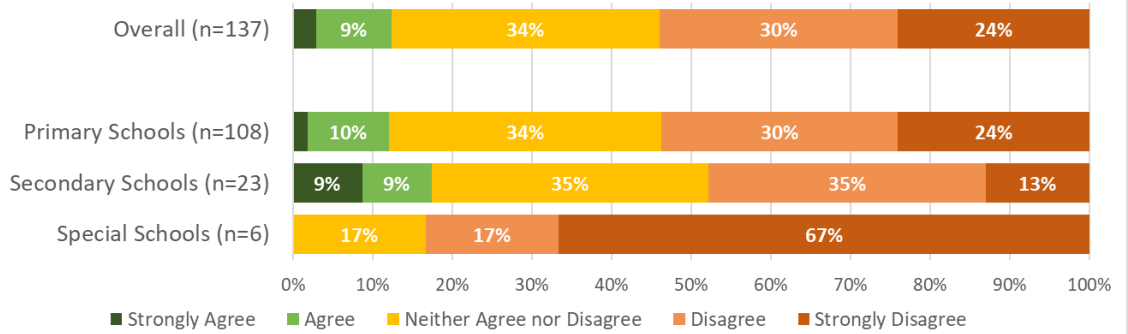




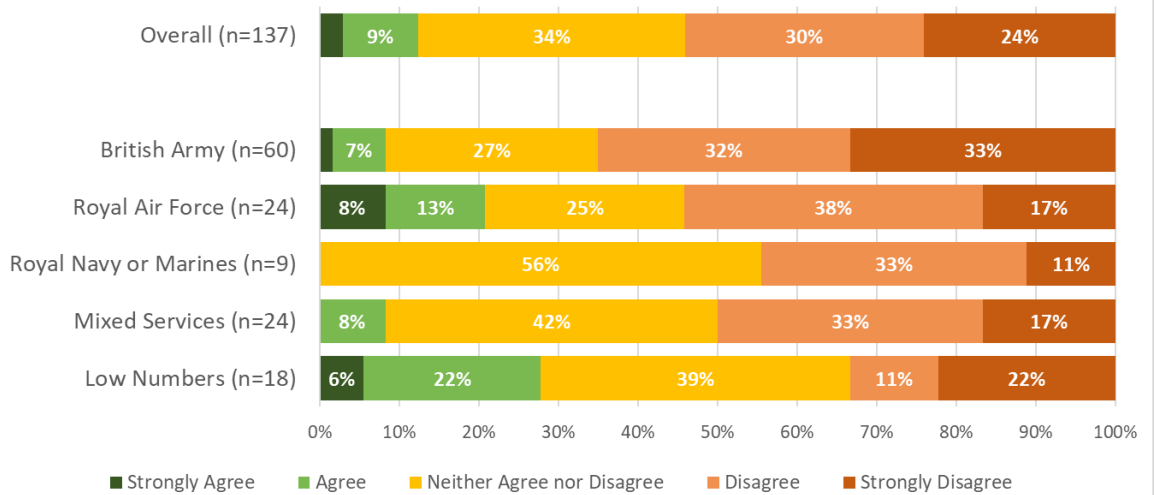
## A.7 Transition From A Different Country



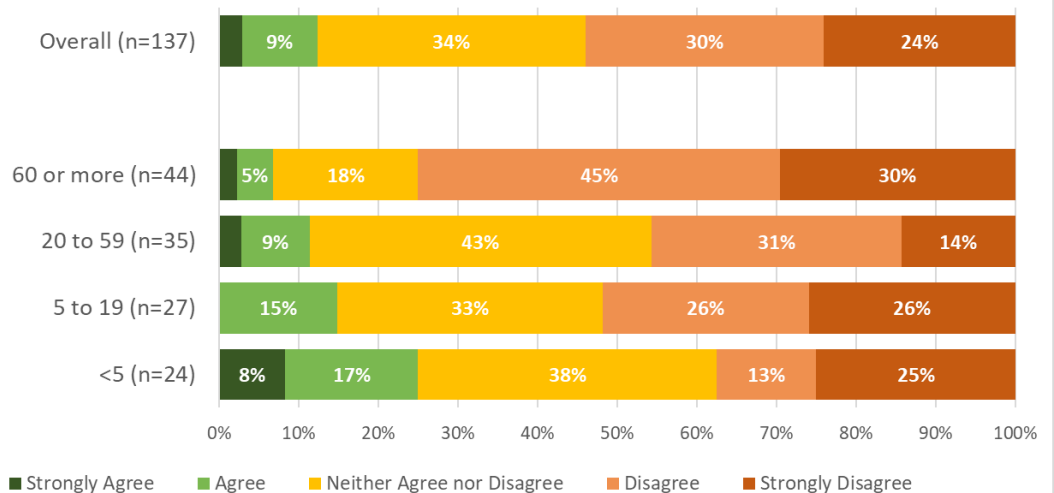
**The transition process for Service pupils with SEND from another country (either within the UK or overseas) is typically smooth (excluding N/A)**



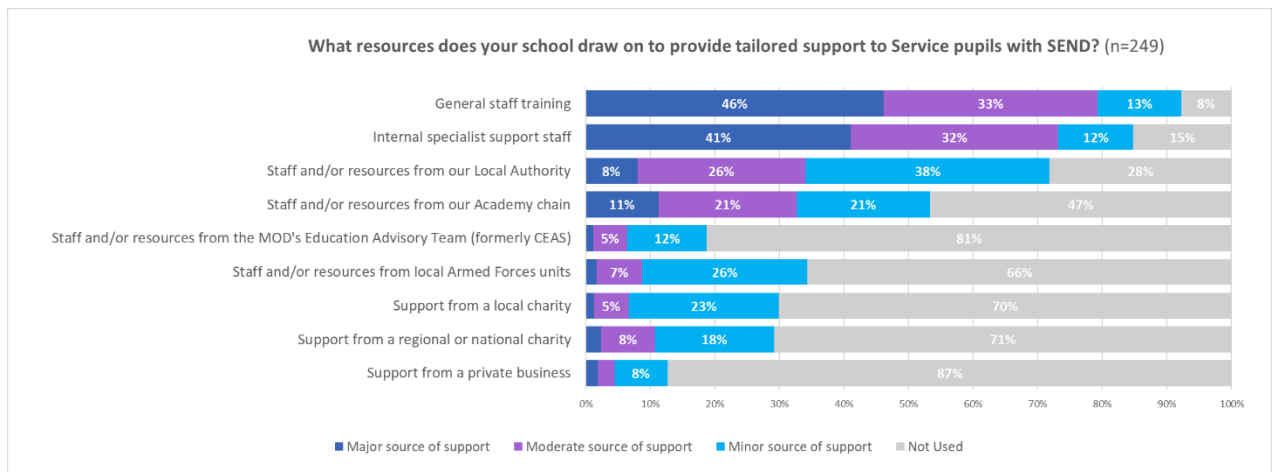
**The transition process for Service pupils with SEND from another country (either within the UK or overseas) is typically smooth (Excluding N/A)**



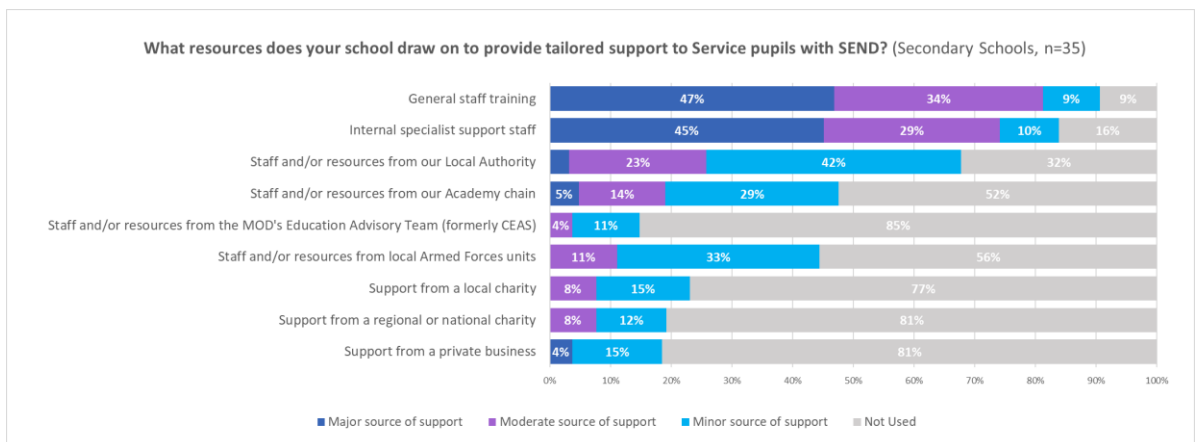
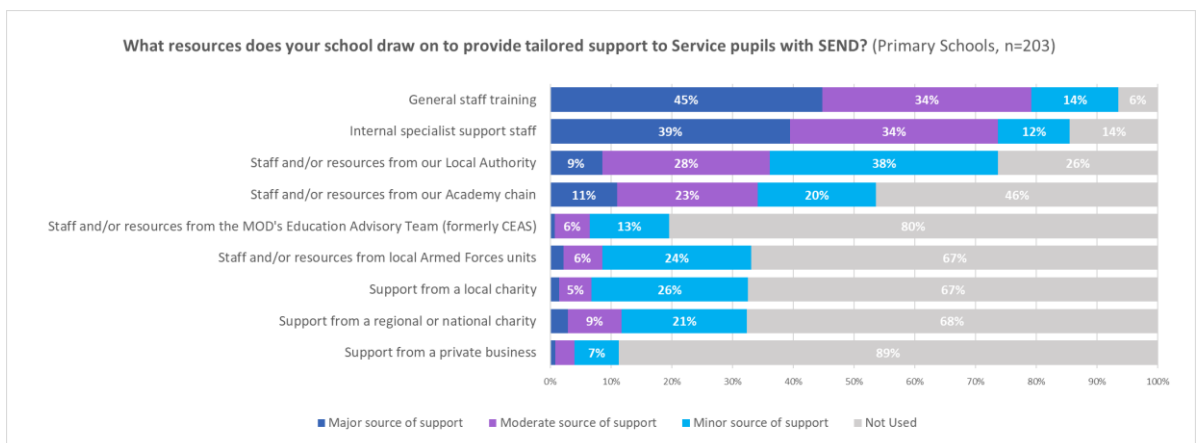
**The transition process for Service pupils with SEND from another country (either within the UK or overseas) is typically smooth (Excluding N/A)**



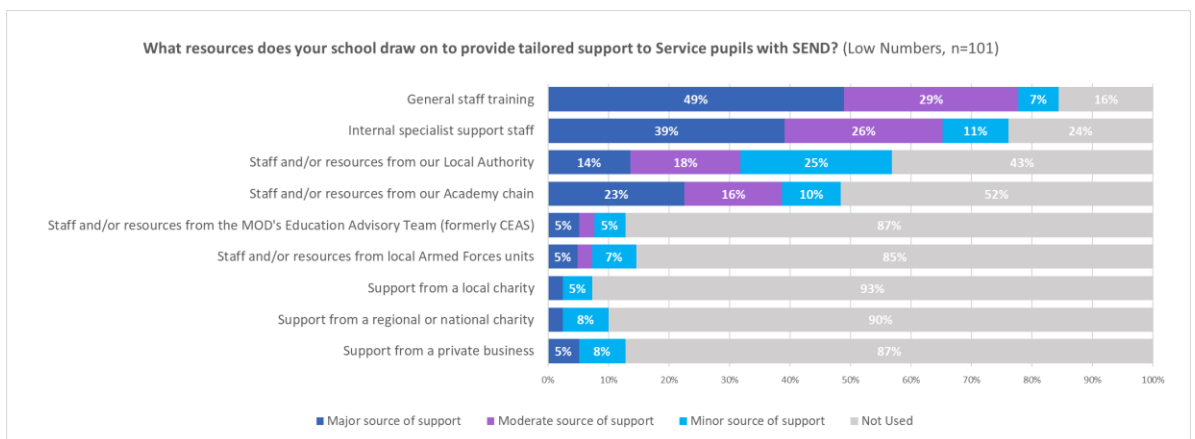
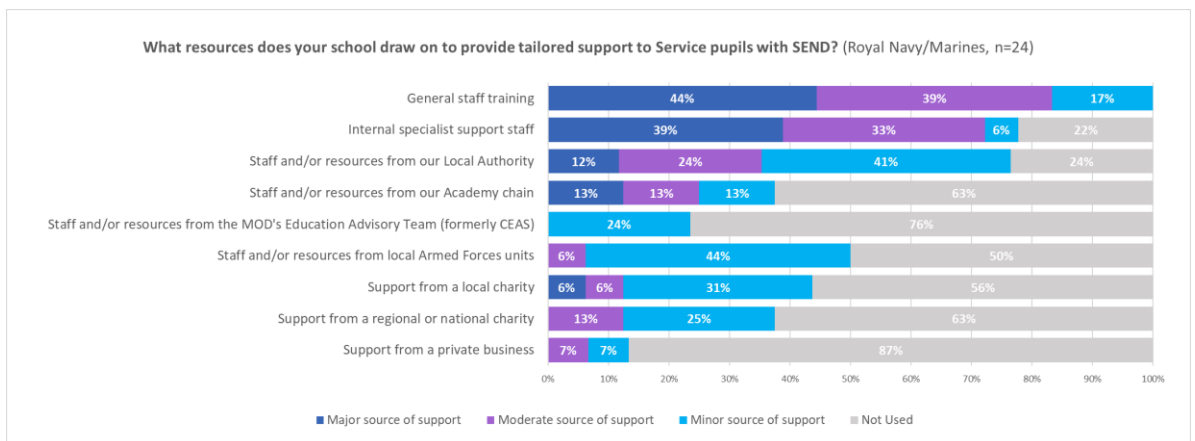
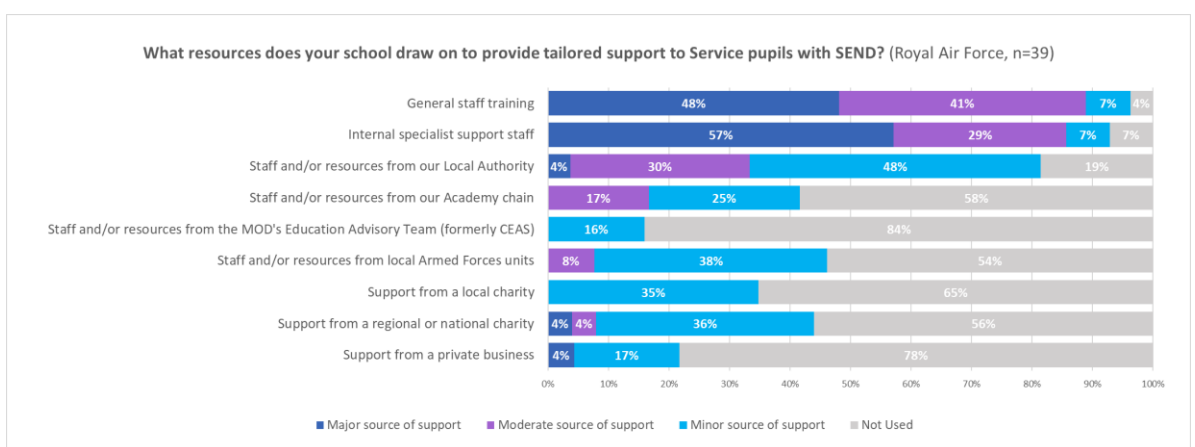
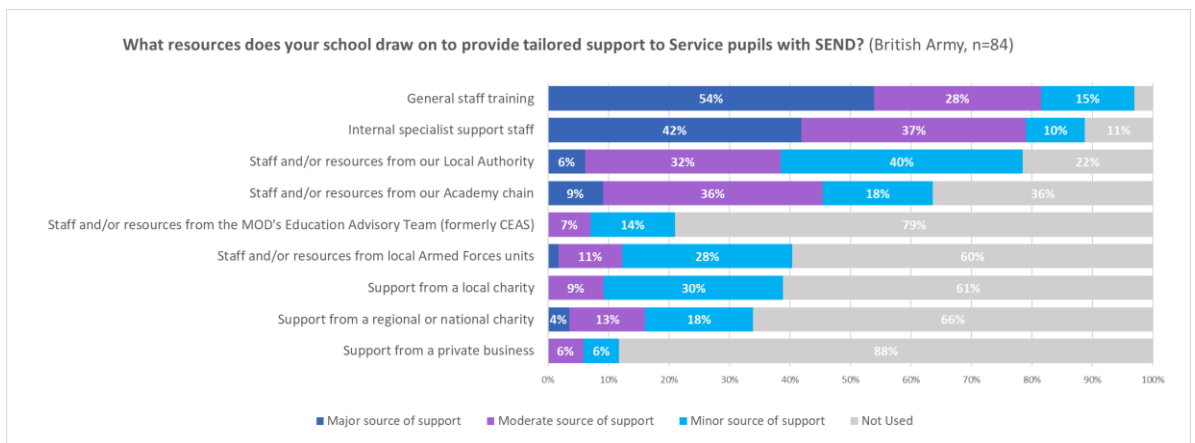
## A.8 Resources



## A.9 Resources by School Type



## A.10 Resources by Service Representation



## A.11 Resources by Number of Service Children on Roll

