



I am proud to work at Talavera Junior, a school which serves our military community; we're always looking for ways to improve our understanding of what life is like for a military child. With this in mind, I made the opinions of our military children the focus of my dissertation - and what I

found surprised me.

To research the opinions of our military children, I conducted a series of focus group meetings. Our initial discussion gave the children the chance to share key areas they would like the chance to explore in more detail: they chose friendships, deployment (including the return of a deployed parent) and learning in school. Holding further meetings focused solely on these topics allowed the children the chance to be more open.



In general, they were fairly relaxed about moving house and the impact this had on friendships. They acknowledged that some friendships were lost but said that they were confident enough to build new ones. They highlighted that parents staying in touch with friends from old homes helped them to see it was possible too. The main frustration they shared

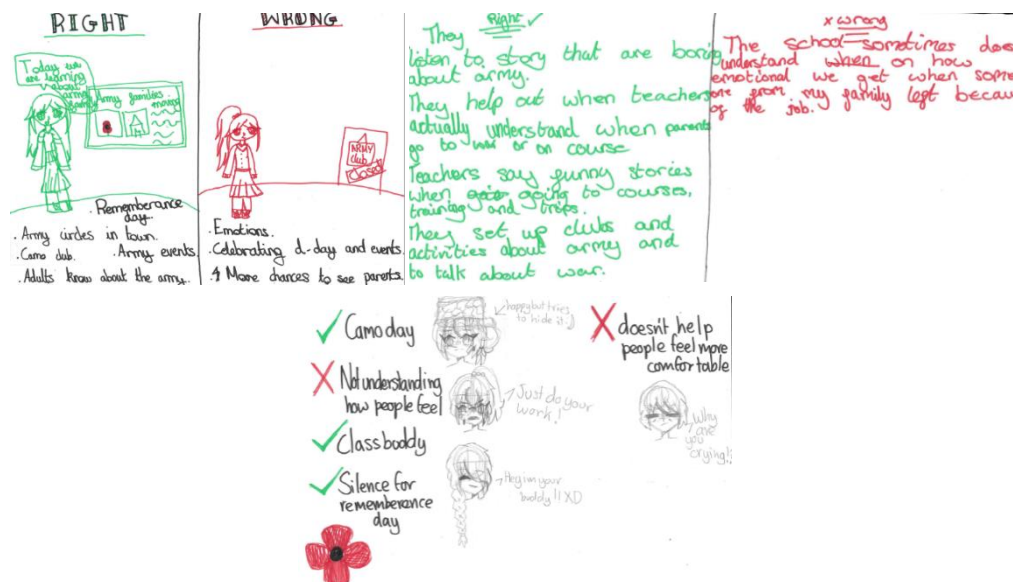
was how little civilian children understood and how this could affect their friendships;



they wanted these friends to know why they might miss a day of school or have joined partway through the year but didn't want to have to explain their situation repeatedly. This is where we, as important adults in their lives, can help facilitate these conversations more generally.

When discussing deployment, the children were initially fairly blasé about how normal it was for them to experience separation from a parent or carer. "You just get on with it," was the general consensus. However, over time, they began to share a deeper issue. One child talked about how difficult it was if they'd been up late in order to have a

phone call with a deployed parent; they didn't feel that adults always understood that they would be tired. Another talked about when a phone call hadn't been successful; how are they meant to concentrate on school work when they think their parent is dead?



That's not me being hyperbolic - the children talked openly about the fears they had

surrounding their parents' deaths. It was a conversation which drove home to me that we can always be doing more to make our whole community feel supported and listened to.

It also highlights the specific emotional strain that children may feel during deployments. Much research on the topic points to children in military families having emotional difficulties whilst being successful academically. In fact, I found that the children I spoke to were wise beyond their years, with an emotional maturity anyone could be proud of.

We run a yearly Camo Day at which, often with amazing help from the army, our children take part in a range of military activities. Our PSHE curriculum features units on the army, unique to our school and always being updated. We hold events such as Parents V Kids Rugby which are designed to encourage engagement with our military families.

However, I am aware just how much more learning we can do and look forward to doing so. The emotional maturity I witnessed is something the school can foster and celebrate more widely. We will keep listening to these remarkable children and will strive to do our best for their unique experiences.

I thank all of the children involved in the focus group who shared their experiences and opinions both honestly and openly. They are a credit to their community, reflecting the pride, strength and insightfulness that makes them special.