

Understanding the Scottish Education System

An overview for Armed Forces families

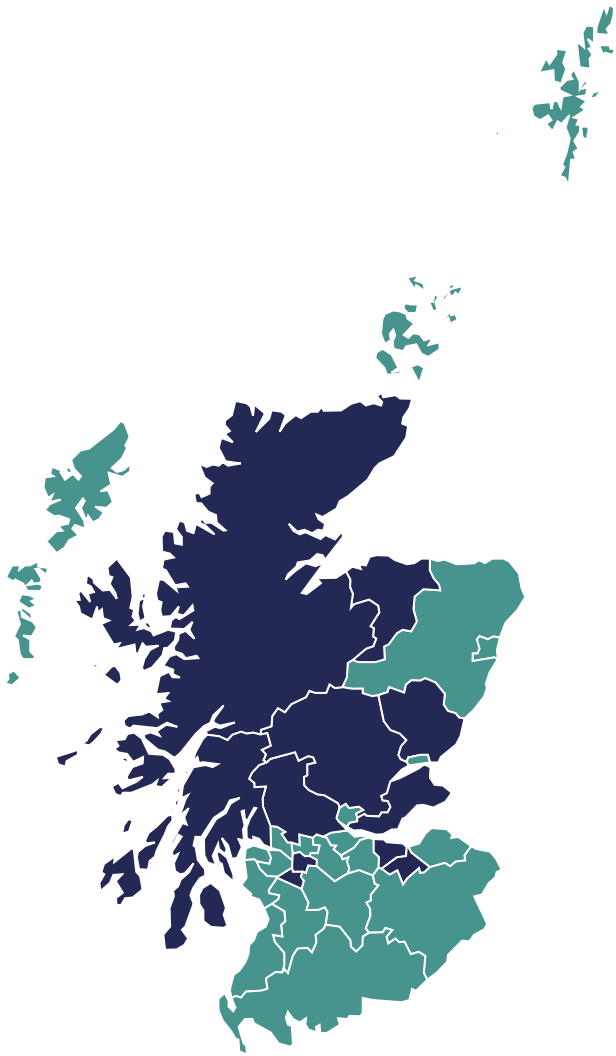
Updated 2021



**FORCES CHILDREN'S
EDUCATION** 



www.forceschildrenseducation.org.uk



Welcome to Scotland

Our education system in Scotland is unique and we are proud of it. If you aren't familiar with Curriculum for Excellence you may find it is quite different to what you are used to.

We have produced this guide to give families an overview of how our system works and help you identify some of the key areas where there may be differences.

All staff aim to give every child the very best education they can. The children from Armed Forces families are no exception.

Your child may be in our early learning and childcare (ELC) settings or schools for only a short while but we will try to do our very best for them while they are in our care.

Education is devolved in Scotland. This means it is not determined by the UK-wide Government based in Westminster.

- 1** The education system in Scotland is completely different to that in England, Wales or Northern Ireland.
- 2** If you are an Armed Forces family posted to Scotland there will probably be a lot of things that you aren't familiar with, but also many things you are familiar with.
- 3** We have ELC and school staff who will do everything they can to ensure your child thrives in our system.



We have
53,400
teachers

Teaching
702,197
pupils



At **2,476**
state-funded
schools

Source: Scottish Government School Estate Statistics 2020

An overview of the Scottish education system

The Scottish Government sets general guidelines about what should be taught but schools and local authorities make decisions on subject matter, while working closely and engaging with pupils and parents.

In Scotland the term 'curriculum' means everything that is planned for your child throughout their educational experience, not just what happens in the classroom.

The four core subjects that schools must provide are: health and wellbeing, literacy, numeracy, and religious and moral education (RME).



In addition to covering the four core subjects, headteachers are free to...

- 1 Introduce projects that use skills and knowledge from more than one subject, leading to joined-up learning.
- 2 Teach about people and places from their local area.
- 3 Involve learners in exploring areas they are interested in.



Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)

For more information, [CLICK HERE](#)

Early years education

Children in Scotland between the ages of three and five are offered 1,140 hours of free, non-compulsory ELC. This helps to give them a good start to their education. It encourages them to learn through play with other children and promotes the development of language and social skills in a safe and fun environment.

For most people, ELC will mean a place at a nursery but it can also mean childminders, play groups or other types of childcare providers.

Learn more at www.parentclub.scot/topics/money-rights/early-years-childcare

Primary education

Children in Scotland complete seven years at primary school. They start primary school, depending on their date of birth, between the ages of four-and-a-half and five-and-a-half years old.

Primary schools follow Curriculum for Excellence, which is very child-centred and flexible.

Schools will use a range of assessments to determine children's progress. Standardised assessment tests (SATs) are not used in Scotland.

The years are called Primary 1 to P7.

Secondary education

The years are called S1-S6. Secondary school is compulsory until the age of 16 (S1 to S4). Pupils have the option of a further two years of study (S5 & S6).

Pupils work towards Nationals, Highers and Advanced Higher qualifications. Most pupils will be around 15 years of age when they start to take qualifications.

Learn more at education.gov.scot/parentzone/learning-in-scotland/assessment-and-achievement

Further education

From the age of 16 education is no longer compulsory. Young people wishing to continue their education can:

- Continue at secondary school.
- Attend a college of further education or university.
- Undertake an apprenticeship.
- Go directly into work or other forms of training.
- Some schools have other flexible options, such as HNC apprenticeships.

Learn more at education.gov.scot/parentzone/learning-in-scotland and at myworldofwork.co.uk



Find a school and contact them early

As soon as you know you are being posted to Scotland, start the process to identify an ELC setting or school for your child and make contact with them.

The military is used to doing everything with only a few weeks of notice. However, to support an effective transition for your child it is really helpful to get in touch with ELC settings and schools as soon as possible.

Most early learning and childcare settings and schools, especially those close to military bases, are used to dealing with families who don't yet know their new address.

ELC settings, schools, and local authorities will have supportive suggestions and they will want to hear from you as soon as possible. For more information, visit <https://forceschildrenseducation.org.uk/families/bases>



www.forceschildrenseducation.org.uk lists all the schools in Scotland that have areas of military housing in their catchment areas.



Tell them you are an Armed Forces family

Every school in Scotland can record whether they have children from Armed Forces families on their roll. When you contact the ELC setting or school, make sure you tell them you are an Armed Forces family. This should raise additional awareness and understanding of your circumstances. It will also help the staff to ensure you and your child receive the best educational outcomes and experience.



Catchment areas

Schools in Scotland are located within local authority catchment areas. Children usually go to the primary or secondary school within their catchment area. ELC provision is not based on catchment – children can attend any setting with places available. Most local authorities have a postcode search function on the education section of their websites. If you know your address you can use this to find your catchment school. Parentzone Scotland also has this function, <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/find-a-school>



Local authorities (rather than the Scottish Government) are largely responsible for education in state schools. There may be variations between councils but children's rights and entitlements are fundamental to our education system.



Choosing a school outside your catchment area....

- 1** You have the right to request a different school if the catchment school is not the one to which you wish to send your child.
- 2** Should you wish to send your child to a school outside the catchment area, you will be required to submit a placing request.
- 3** The local authority will make a decision on the request. There is an appeal process. Choose a school at <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/find-a-school>

If you are considering putting your child into a school that's not in the catchment area for the local base, we would suggest you consider sending them to a school with at least a few other Armed Forces children.

Children like going to school with other Forces children. They don't like standing out and it can help make them feel better being surrounded by other children who understand what their lives are like.

A searchable list of all the catchment schools serving the main military bases in Scotland is available at www.forceschildrenseducation.org.uk



Applying for a place

1. Identify the school you want your child to attend.
2. Contact the school or local authority and they will advise you how to complete the enrolment process.
3. If you are applying for a place at a school that is not in your catchment area, you will need to make a placing request - the school or local authority will talk you through how to do this.

How to find out what a school is like

- 1** Look at their website. School websites and their social media pages will offer lots of the information that you need.

Use www.forceschildrenseducation.org.uk to find links to the websites of all the schools that serve military bases in Scotland.

- 2** Once you've made a shortlist, give the school a call and tell them you're interested in enrolling your child.

They will probably encourage you to visit them in person so they can show you around but for lots of Armed Forces parents, a visit is not practical. Ask if you can schedule a phone call with the headteacher instead. Some schools have created online tours of their classrooms.

- 3** We don't publish league tables in Scotland but if you want to read copies of the official government inspection reports on individual schools, visit www.education.gov.scot/parentzone and type in the name of the school you are looking for. You can also visit <https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/inspection-reports>

- 4** You can also talk to other Armed Forces families but bear in mind that every individual has a different point of view and experience.

What works for another family and is their child's experience won't necessarily be the same for you. You know your own child better than anyone. You know what they need and the kind of environment that would be best for them.



Additional support needs

(what you need to know if your child needs extra help)

In Scotland....

- 1** We support children according to need.
- 2** You don't need a formal diagnosis to get extra support.
- 3** It is assumed that the additional support needs of a child will be met within mainstream school and ELC settings and that support will be provided there.
- 4** In Scotland there are additional support needs staff available to every school.



ENQUIRE is the additional support for learning advice and information service for parents in Scotland. If you need personal advice on your specific circumstances, contact them on 0345 123 2303 or visit <https://enquire.org.uk>

ENQUIRE
Helping you understand additional support for learning

1 in 3

pupils in Scotland has an identified additional support need

Children and young people may require additional support for a variety of reasons, either for a short period or throughout their education journey. Reasons will vary but they could include:

- Being particularly gifted
- Moving frequently
- Having English as a second language
- Social, emotional or behavioural difficulties
- Home life
- Bullying
- A sensory impairment or communication problem
- A physical disability
- A learning difficulty
- Being a young carer.

There are 114 state-funded special schools in Scotland

The inclusion and education of children with additional support needs is generally met in mainstream schools and ELC settings.

Many mainstream ELC settings and schools are very successful in meeting the needs of all children. However, the needs of some children and young people will be better met in specialist settings rather than in mainstream schools.

It is important that the views of parents and children are taken into account when it comes to school placement and that there continues to be on-going discussion and an element of choice in provision.

Approaches differ between local authorities. Some authorities offer specialist settings (shared facilities) within mainstream schools; others do not have any special schools.

Many of our special schools ensure positive outcomes for children and young people and high-quality support for them and their families. Excellent education is offered, with very effective leadership from headteachers and principals.

Visit the Parentzone Scotland website at education.gov.scot/parentzone for more advice on choosing a school if your child has additional support needs.



GIRFEC. What do you need to know?

Getting it Right for Every Child (sometimes shortened to GIRFEC) is a national approach which schools and teachers in Scotland use in supporting the wellbeing of children and young people.

As an Armed Forces parent you need to know about the Getting it Right for Every Child approach because it is a central part of our education system and is how we offer support to children and families.

The approach ensures children and young people are supported individually and offered the right help, at the right time, from the right people.

Schools are able to offer direct advice or support from their own resources. If needed, and with parental agreement, they can also seek help from another service or practitioner.

Wellbeing

Wellbeing is at the heart of the Getting it Right for Every Child approach.

The Scottish education system recognises that a child or young person's wellbeing is influenced by everything around them.

If their wellbeing is suffering it may have an effect on their ability to achieve their goals.



If your child is struggling at school or is unhappy, speak to the school and tell them you are concerned about their wellbeing. Schools want parents to keep them informed about how their child is feeling so that they can support them.

Check the holiday dates



If you are coming to Scotland from another education system you will probably find that the holidays are significantly different.

It is common for Forces families to book a family holiday, get posted to Scotland, and then find out the schools are not on holiday when they are due to be away. If that happens to you, don't panic. Contact your child's school, BEFORE the holiday, and explain the situation.

Schools will generally be more supportive when they know you are a Forces family as educators understand some of the challenges and mobility issues that face the military.

Bear in mind that neighbouring authorities may have different holiday dates. If you have children in schools in different authorities, or you work in one authority and your children go to school in another, you may find that their holiday dates are at different times. It is always good to check this before bookings are made.

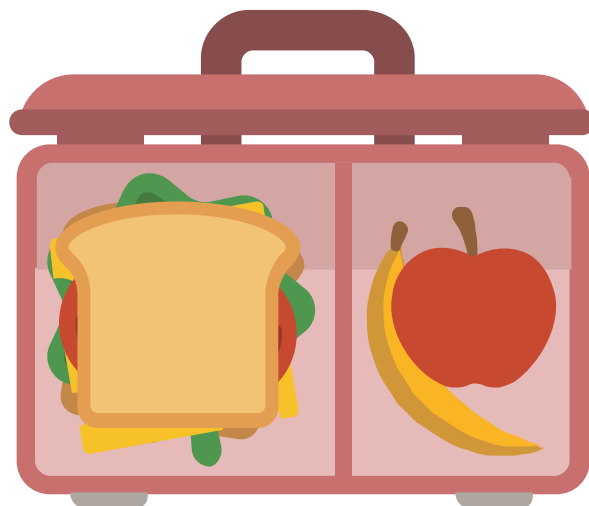
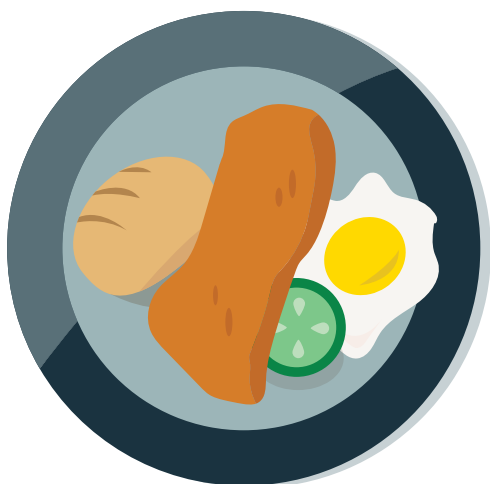
Schools in Scotland generally break for summer at the end of June and return in the middle of August.

Children in P1 - P5 get free school lunches

Every local authority does it differently but there is usually a choice of a hot or cold meal.

Parents are also able to provide their child with packed lunches if they wish.

Learn more at www.gov.scot/news/free-school-meals-1





Starting primary school

Children moving to Scotland may have already started reception class elsewhere. The headteacher in your child's new school will be able to advise which nursery stage they will be joining.

The main difference is that nursery isn't a formal school environment – at many, the children don't wear uniforms and the days are shorter.

This can be concerning for parents but the things they are learning and the developmental stages they reach will be similar.

Admission dates



When your child is eligible to start school depends on the date of their fifth birthday. If this falls on or between 1 March to 31 August, your child will usually start school in the August of the year they turn five. If their birthday is on or between 1 September and the last day in February, your child will usually start school in the August in the year before they turn five.

Admission dates for nursery in Scotland are different - funded places are usually offered for the term after a child's third birthday.

What are your options if your child is at primary school in England but of early years age when you move to Scotland?

- 1** The first thing is not to worry. Early learning and childcare provision in Scotland is broadly equivalent to reception year in other parts of the UK.
- 2** Children in Scotland are put into age-appropriate classes. However, parents in Scotland can ask to defer their child starting school until they are one year older, if they think this is in their child's best interests. For that reason, it's unusual for children to be moved into P1 if they should be in Year 2 of ELC.
- 3** If you know you are going to be in the Scottish system for only a short while and will then be returning to England, or if your child's birthday is very close to 28/29 February, it may be possible to apply for early entry to primary school.

Starting secondary school

Children in Scotland transition to secondary school aged 11/12, similar to the rest of the UK.

Because of the difference in cut-off dates (February rather than August) you may find when you move here that your child who is in their first year at secondary school is, technically, supposed to be in their final year of primary school in Scotland.

The official guidance from the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) to all schools is that if a child has already started at secondary school elsewhere in the UK, they should be allowed to continue if they wish.



What are your options if your child is at secondary school in England but on moving to Scotland is still of primary school age?

- 1** If your child has already started at secondary school, they are being successful and want to stay at secondary school when they arrive in Scotland, they should be able to, states official guidance to schools from ADES.
- 2** Bear in the mind that, unless your child repeats S1, he or she will always be in a class with peers who are 12-18 months older than them.
- 3** Your child may decide themselves that they want to repeat the few months of primary school which will give them a chance to make friends and move up to secondary with their peers.
- 4** You could delay your move so that your child finishes their first year of secondary school in England and then enters the first year of secondary when they move to Scotland. This option would require further investigation and discussion to determine if it is appropriate.

There is no single solution that suits everybody. What you decide will depend on your own personal circumstances, what best suits your family and your child, and how long you think your child will be in the Scottish education system.

As a parent, what can you do to help your child transition?

- 1 Try and get the school your child is leaving involved in the transition process.
- 2 Keep communicating with the new school throughout the time your child is at the school.
- 3 Help the new school become familiar with your child's learning journey and progress so far.
- 4 Be aware that your child might take longer than you think to settle.



Get the two schools talking

The process of a child moving from one school to another is called the 'transition process' by education professionals.

It will really help if you can get both schools involved and sharing information to help ensure a smooth transition. The school you are going to will want to contact the school you are coming from.

Try and find a specific person at your old school who can speak to the new school. Ideally, it would be someone who knows your child and will be expecting the call.

Schools will want to get a copy of your child's school record. Keep your child's existing school informed about your moving date so that they can have school records ready in time.

Often a lot of what schools need to know isn't in a pupil's files - it's things only you and your child can tell them. So make a list of their interests, hobbies, personal circumstances and any additional needs.

Ensure you keep communicating

Life for Armed Forces families can change dramatically at very short notice. Even short deployments and the absence of a parent can have an impact.

Communication is crucial. Try and speak to your child's school and their teacher regularly.

It's not just events affecting your own family that can have an impact on your child - perhaps a neighbour is being posted and your child is finding the sight of a removal van upsetting. Or another unit is being deployed and it's making your child worry about their own parent going away.

All of these things can be unsettling for children and young people and have an impact on their ability to learn.

If you let the school know what is happening they will do what they can to help and support your child.



Be familiar with your child's learning journey

One of the main difficulties for Armed Forces children when they move schools is what's called 'interruptions to their learning' - missing classes and key learning outcomes in particular subjects.

Getting it Right for Every Child is at the core of the Scottish Education system, which means that if schools and teachers are able to identify areas that a child has missed, there are lots of ways that they can help your child catch up.

It will really help if the school knows what your child has covered in their previous school and what they were about to do. This is especially important if you are moving mid-term. You can make it as easy as possible for your new school by asking the sending school to make a list of all the topics they have and haven't done and sharing that with the new school.

The Scottish education system is very flexible, with little of the curriculum set at a national level. This means that teachers can fit lessons around individual children and help them catch up or give them additional work if they've already studied a subject. However, they can do that only if they know the circumstances. Armed Forces children don't like to stand out, so your child might not say anything to their teacher if they don't know something or if they're bored because they've covered something before.

Be aware it might take longer than you think

Although children are resilient, adults sometimes adapt to new environments a lot quicker than children do and it can take up to a year to settle in a new school. This is particularly true if they've had a number of school changes.

Be aware that your timeline might be different to your child's. You may find that you settle in much sooner than your child does.

Feel free to ask for regular catch ups with your child's teacher to see how they are doing.

Make sure you tell your child's teacher if they're unhappy or missing old friends.



Schools do understand some of the demands of Armed Forces life and when parents make them aware of their challenges, they will try and be flexible. For example, if one parent can't make a parents' evening it may be possible to arrange a separate time when you can both attend.



Where to find further information

This document has been produced to give Armed Forces parents who are unfamiliar with the Scottish education system an overview of how schools in Scotland work.

There are a number of organisations doing some fantastic work to help support your children. Further detailed, in-depth information can be obtained from the following sites:



PARENTZONE SCOTLAND

Website for parents giving information about education in Scotland and ideas to help parents support their children's learning.

www.education.gov.scot/parentzone

Includes choosing a school, the curriculum, Parent Councils and supporting learning at home.

EDUCATION SCOTLAND

This Scottish Government executive agency is charged with supporting quality and improvement in Scottish education and securing the delivery of better learning experiences and outcomes for Scottish learners of all ages.

www.education.gov.scot

Contains inspection reports on schools, policy documents and a detailed overview of the Scottish education system.

ENQUIRE

Scottish advice service for additional support for learning.

Offers independent and impartial advice and information about how pupils should be helped to get the right support to be successful learners.

<https://enquire.org.uk/>

Provides a range of clear and easy to read guides and factsheets explaining everything from how to find out if your child needs extra help at school to what should happen when they leave school.



Ministry
of Defence

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EDUCATION

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Detailed guidance from the MoD
on education in Scotland.

[https://www.gov.uk/
government/groups/the-
childrens-education-advisory-
service-ceas](https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/the-childrens-education-advisory-service-ceas)

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