

## **First Level Analysis of Data on Armed Forces Children in Scottish Local Authority Schools 2025-2026**

### **1. Purpose**

It is the purpose of this report to provide an initial analysis of the data on armed forces children in Scottish local authority schools published by the Scottish Government on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2026. This is the first national publication of this information which was collected as part of the 2025 school census.

### **2. Context**

As with all other data resulting from the school census, this is a freeze-frame picture representing the position at a single point of time. Since this is a mobile population, it is almost certain that there have been marginal changes in the numbers at the time of writing this report. For the same reason the figures do not capture the level of mobility in the population, nor the rate of “churn”, i.e. turnover, in individual schools or authorities. This latter characteristic is reported by practitioners as being an important characteristic impacting on this group of children and young people as well as the static population.

### **3. Caveats**

There are a number of unavoidable limits to the data. These principally are:

- No data from the early learning and childcare (ELC) sector.
- Where authorities have reported small numbers, this data has been suppressed for reasons of data protection, and these figures do not therefore feature in the overall totals.
- That need to suppress small numbers means that other numbers in the tables have also been suppressed to disallow any calculation that would reveal the small number.
- Taken together these factors mean that there is an incomplete overall picture with 22 gaps in Table 5.15a, and 22 in Table 5.15b.
- In table 5.15b some 575 children have no disclosed service background. This is 4.9% of the population which is a significant gap in the information.

The issue of non-disclosure is well known. Some families for security or personal reasons do not wish to disclose. In other cases, the schools may have not accurately captured the data, for example the non-disclosure in Highland at 215 out of 459 children appears anomalously high, as does Aberdeen City (51 out of 219).

### **4. Comparison with Previous Years**

The 2024 ADES data collection indicated some 13,111 children in Scotland which is 1,383 more than the 11,728 captured in this 2025 exercise. Some of this will be due to the absence of figures from ELC settings which accounted for 398 children in 2024. Of the

others, Highland (-445), South Ayrshire (-287), West Lothian (-126), Aberdeenshire (-88) and Inverclyde (-87) account for much of the difference. Only 7 authorities showed gains and these were modest being well within the levels of variability that might be expected with normal changes to school rolls. These variations highlight the value of the Scottish Government collecting this data and the necessary rigour that will increasingly be associated with this exercise.

It is recognised that in 2023 and 2024 ADES collated data on the additional support needs (ASN) of this group of children, but that this was not possible with the Scottish Government exercise.

## 5. Main Characteristics of the Data

**Table 1: Distribution of Armed Forces Children in Scotland by Education Sector 2025/2026**

	<b>Primary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>Special</b>	<b>Total</b>
Number	7,111	4,477	140	11,728
Percent	60.6	38.2	1.2	100.0

The characteristics of the data by education sector are shown in Table 1 and Chart 1. In the same data release by the Scottish Government the percentage distribution for all children was primary (53.5%), secondary (45.3%), and special (1.2%). That the national and armed forces special percentages are the same is consistent with previous research findings. Similarly, the disparity between armed forces and national percentages for primary and secondary populations has been noted in the previous ADES exercises. That there are 7.1% fewer armed forces secondary children than the national percentage must be of concern. It may be due to under-reporting as a result of either non-declaration by parents or school reporting errors. It may, however, be due to other factors including withdrawal from school or failure of children to progress beyond statutory leaving age. Another explanatory factor could be secondary aged children not accompanying their parents to postings north of the border. **Whatever the cause the possibility that there are fewer secondary-aged children in school than there should be must be of concern and merits further research.**

Chart 1: Distribution of Armed Forces Children in Scotland by Education Sector 2025/2026

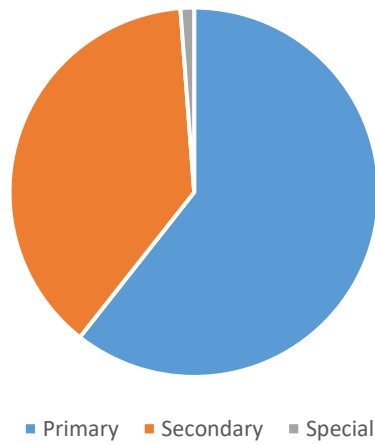
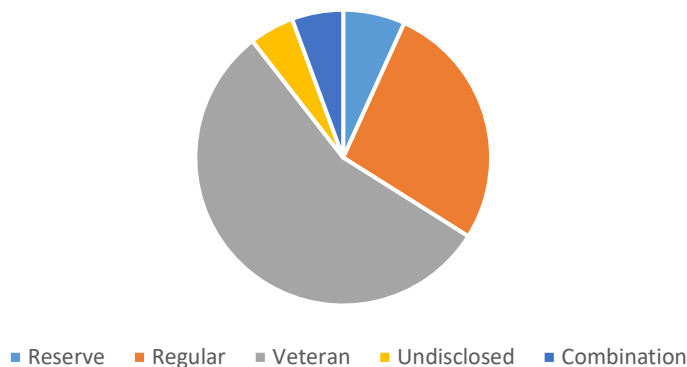


Table 2: Distribution of Armed Forces Children in Scotland by Service Background 2025/2026

	Reserve	Regular	Veteran	Undisclosed	Combination	Total
Number	796	3,184	6,514	575	659	11,728
Percent	6.8	27.1	55.5	4.9	5.6	100

Table 2 and Chart 2 show the service backgrounds of the armed forces children. As highlighted earlier, in section 3, 4.9% of children have an undisclosed background. The pattern of non-disclosure also varies across Scotland. This given, the proportion of veterans families children at 55.5% is an order of magnitude larger than the next largest category – regulars at 27.1%. This highlights that in terms of weight of numbers the children of veterans’ families need appropriate consideration and attention relative to the more visible regular population.

Chart 2: Distribution of Armed Forces Children in Scotland by Service Background of Parents 2025/2026



Reference to Appendix 1 shows that, as in previous years, all Scottish local authorities have some armed forces children. Of these, those with the largest presence are:

- Moray (1,619)
- Fife (1,314)
- Argyll and Bute (688)
- City of Edinburgh (624)
- South Lanarkshire (619)
- Dumfries and Galloway (496)
- (Highland (459)
- Angus (410)

Of these, the relatively high numbers in Dumfries and Galloway and South Lanarkshire are surprisingly high given the absence of any major base in these areas. Conversely, Midlothian (356) Glasgow City (229), Dundee City (122) appear to have low figures in comparison to the strength of their military presence or their absolute size in population terms. For example, Clackmannanshire which is Scotland's smallest authority, with 122 armed forces children is recording a number exactly the same as Dundee City.

## **6. Summary of Possible Action Points Related to the Data**

On the strength of this, and previous data sets, a number of possible action points are suggested:

- Further improvements in the quality of the data are possible through:
  - Reduction in the numbers of non-disclosures.
  - Inclusion, at an appropriate point, inclusion of ELC statistics.
  - Review of data from authorities where there are major year-on-year data swings or where, as with the big cities, figures appear low.
- The apparently low numbers of secondary-aged children relative to primary merits further research and investigation.
- In terms of weight of numbers continued attention to the needs of veterans' children would be justified.
- The fact that some authorities are recording high numbers despite having no major base areas indicates that the needs of the dispersed armed forces population should be considered when support is being researched or planned.

## **7. Conclusion**

This is the first national data collection undertaken as part of the wider School Census. It is a very welcome development as providing a study which is part of a unified data exercise. This makes consistency of approach much more possible than in the past with a resulting improvement in the quality of data.

**Carolyn MacLeod**  
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## Appendix 1: Data as Published by the Scottish Government

**Table 5.15a: Pupils from armed forces families, by sector and local authority, 2025**

Local Authority	Primary	Secondary	Special	Total
Aberdeen City	139	c	c	219
Aberdeenshire	299	183	5	487
Angus	270	140	0	410
Argyll and Bute	416	263	9	688
City of Edinburgh	365	243	16	624
Clackmannanshire	82	40	0	122
Dumfries and Galloway	304	192	0	496
Dundee City	63	c	c	122
East Ayrshire	153	90	5	248
East Dunbartonshire	131	c	c	234
East Lothian	108	112	0	220
East Renfrewshire	92	c	c	167
Falkirk	45	c	c	91
Fife	827	455	32	1,314
Glasgow City	156	73	0	229
Highland	253	196	10	459
Inverclyde	98	49	5	152
Midlothian	242	c	c	356
Moray	948	671	0	1,619
Na h-Eileanan Siar	42	12	0	54
North Ayrshire	166	76	7	249
North Lanarkshire	247	127	15	389
Orkney Islands	23	11	0	34
Perth and Kinross	189	c	c	310
Renfrewshire	272	c	c	371
Scottish Borders	199	130	0	329
Shetland Islands	23	8	0	31
South Ayrshire	182	c	c	324
South Lanarkshire	364	249	6	619
Stirling	88	c	c	164
West Dunbartonshire	129	111	5	245
West Lothian	196	c	c	352
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,111</b>	<b>4,477</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>11,728</b>

**Table 5.15b: Pupils from armed forces families, by service background of parents, sector and local authority, 2025**

Local Authority	Reserve	Regular	Veteran	Undisclosed	Combination	Total
Aberdeen City	21	39	108	51	0	219
Aberdeenshire	30	40	376	10	31	487
Angus	37	101	251	9	12	410
Argyll and Bute	29	375	246	15	23	688
City of Edinburgh	55	235	293	26	15	624
Clackmannanshire	14	16	81	c	c	122
Dumfries and Galloway	33	78	332	28	25	496
Dundee City	8	19	74	7	14	122
East Ayrshire	22	50	165	0	11	248
East Dunbartonshire	30	39	142	5	18	234
East Lothian	19	31	149	6	15	220
East Renfrewshire	7	37	99	7	17	167
Falkirk	c	23	55	c	5	91
Fife	92	349	753	41	79	1,314
Glasgow City	23	60	126	7	13	229
Highland	13	63	159	215	9	459
Inverclyde	16	39	89	c	c	152
Midlothian	34	116	183	6	17	356
Moray	39	899	545	62	74	1,619
Na h-Eileanan Siar	6	c	41	c	c	54
North Ayrshire	19	35	181	c	c	249
North Lanarkshire	c	68	263	c	33	389
Orkney Islands	c	c	26	0	5	34
Perth and Kinross	39	34	208	10	19	310
Renfrewshire	45	83	205	15	23	371
Scottish Borders	29	54	226	c	c	329
Shetland Islands	c	0	24	c	c	31
South Ayrshire	22	37	231	8	26	324
South Lanarkshire	36	87	403	19	74	619
Stirling	11	50	97	0	6	164
West Dunbartonshire	c	63	142	c	22	245
West Lothian	21	59	241	6	25	352
Scotland	796	3,184	6,514	575	659	11,728