

## Pupils' farewell to soldier dads



### GOOD LUCK DADS

#### SCHOOL SEND-OFF:

Pupils at Weeton Primary School hold up cards spelling out 'Good Luck Dads'.

Children at Weeton Primary School sent this heartfelt message to their soldier fathers as troops prepared to fly out to war-torn Iraq.

More than 600 soldiers from the First Battalion Royal Green Jackets based at Weeton are due to start a seven-month deployment in south east Iraq in the next 10 days.

So children at the on-site school invited their dads to a special assembly to sing them a fond farewell.

Headteacher Chris Horrocks said: "The children wanted to do something special for their dads before they leave over the next few days.



"The children have made bookmarks with photos and a little message on for their dads to take away.

"We have also asked dads to plant bulbs with the children which will flower in the spring while they are away and the children will be able to show them the flower on their return.

"It is a time of great upheaval for the families and, while not all understand what is going on, some are worried and we want to provide a supportive and stable environment at school."

The Gazette today launched a message board for families and friends to leave notes for the troops at [www.blackpooltoday.co.uk](http://www.blackpooltoday.co.uk). The soldiers have access to the internet while they are out in Iraq and will be able to read the messages sent to them.



Lance Corporal Paul Castle, 27, heads to Iraq on Wednesday. He said: "It was really nice for the school to invite us to hear the kids singing – it will be a nice memory to take away. I just want to get there now and get it over with."

Wife Samantha, 24, said: "It was a lovely event and helps the children get used to the idea their dads are going away and ready to say goodbye.

"I don't think it has really hit us yet.

"I am too busy rushing around getting everything ready for him but I am sure it will hit me when he goes."

Daughter Kaitlyn, six, had her very own message for her daddy: "Bye bye daddy, come back soon." Rifleman James Peacock, 25, is heading to Iraq on his last tour of duty on Monday leaving behind wife Claire, 11-year-old Paul, Olivia, six, and Miah, two.

He said: "It is hard leaving them but this is the job. I am glad the school did this, the kids got a lot out of it, it helps them realise what is going on and it is not just them saying goodbye."

Claire said the school would be an important focal point for those left behind.

She said: "All the lads are going away together and will be concentrating on their jobs, the wives all have each other and the children have their friends at school all going through the same thing which helps."

The main deployment of the troops will take place on Wednesday and Thursday next week. They will patrol south east Iraq with Basra being the main base.

Soldiers will be able to keep in touch with those back home via e-mail.