

MEDWAY SECURE TRAINING CENTRE

Background

1. Medway Secure Training Centre (STC) is one of three functioning purpose-built secure training centres. All are currently managed by G4S Care and Justice Services Limited. Medway STC is situated in Kent and offers secure provision for young people aged 12-17 who meet the criteria for a custodial sentence or who are remanded to a custodial setting. The centre has 74 places and accommodates both boys and girls. At the time of our visit 10 young women and 45 young men were in residence.
2. As the inspectorates were made aware of the emerging allegations made by the BBC concerning abusive behaviour by staff at the STC, urgent consideration was given to what action was needed to provide assurance on the immediate safety of the young people in the centre. The decision was taken not to conduct a full inspection in order to avoid compromising the integrity of the ongoing criminal investigation. Instead we decided that an experienced team of six inspectors from HMI Prisons and Ofsted visit Medway to seek assurance as to the immediate and future safety of children living at the centre. The visit was led by the Deputy Chief Inspector of Prisons and a senior Her Majesty's Inspector from Ofsted and took place on Monday 11 January 2016. We were subsequently informed by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) that the Secretary of State for Justice would like a copy of the report.

Methodology and findings

3. The team met with senior managers of the centre, representatives of the YJB and the director of Medway children's services. In addition four inspectors carried out individual, confidential interviews with young people. Young people were selected by inspectors; those involved in the police investigation were not invited to be interviewed. In addition, any young person who asked to speak to inspectors was given the opportunity to do so. One young person took up this opportunity. In total 20 young people were spoken to out of a population of 55.
4. Inspectors used a semi structured interview approach using open questions about young people's views about their safety in the centre as well as the quality of relationships with staff. Young people spoken to by inspectors were generally positive about the quality of relationships with staff and felt safe in the centre. All young people spoken to know how to make a complaint and identified staff they could speak to if they had a problem. We were concerned that the complaints box was opened by a duty operational manager (DOM).
5. In addition to the positive comments a small number of young people described some staff using insulting, aggressive or racist language, not always challenging poor behaviour and feeling unsafe in areas not covered by CCTV. In addition, some young people told us the high turnover of staff led to

new staff not fully understanding, or managing, behaviour on the residential units. A high turnover of custody staff has been a feature of Medway in the last twelve months. This is reported as in the region of 50% of the basic grade custody staff. Two young people expressed concern about the application of restraint on two occasions. Although senior managers were aware of both incidents, inspectors requested assurance that normal safeguarding procedures were followed. G4S were also asked for a report on an incident of restraint that a young person said had happened to them when in Rainsbrook STC. We are awaiting a response on both these issues.

6. The concerns raised with us by a small number of children are consistent with the evidence presented by the BBC investigation which showed targeted bullying of vulnerable boys by a small number of staff in addition to the conditioning of new staff. There was also evidence in the BBC programme that a larger group of staff must have been aware of unacceptable practice but did not challenge or report this behaviour.

Conclusion

7. Inspectors are satisfied the immediate actions taken by STC senior managers in conjunction with the police, YJB and local authority are adequate and in line with safeguarding procedures. Measures have been put in place to ensure appropriate staffing levels are in place. Additional independent oversight and support for young people has been provided by the YJB monitor and Barnardo's advocates.
8. In the medium term, however, we have significant concerns about the centre. It is clear from the BBC footage that a number of staff must have been aware of unacceptable behaviour and the practice of falsifying use of force records but this went unreported to senior managers or external agencies. These risks are further increased by the very high rate of staff turnover, particularly front line residential staff.
9. Managerial oversight failed to protect young people from harm. Effective oversight is key to creating a positive culture that prevents poor practice happening and ensuring it is reported when it does. This is particularly important in institutions that detain children as they are significantly less likely to submit a complaint about their treatment than their adult counterparts¹. It is of note that staff carried out poor practice in areas of the centre that were not covered by CCTV in addition to using inappropriate language that they knew would not be recorded. This was consistent with accounts from some children who felt most unsafe in areas not covered by CCTV.

¹Learning from PPO Investigations: Why do women and young people not complain?
http://www.ppo.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Why-do-women-and-young-people-in-custody-not-make-formal-complaints_final.pdf

10. Some of the concerns raised in this report are not confined to Medway or the STC model of custody. A thematic inspection into behaviour management and restraint in 2015 outlined significant differences between policy and practice across the estate and all recommendations made should be implemented in full.

Recommendations

The Secretary of State should immediately establish a commissioner to provide additional external oversight of the governance of the centre. The commissioner would provide increased oversight, scrutiny and challenge of managerial arrangements in particular in relation to the safeguarding of young people.

Body worn cameras should be immediately implemented across all institutions holding children, all staff in regular contact with children should wear them and be expected to record all use of force incidents. All footage should be reviewed by a senior manager.

We will carry out new inspections of all STCs as soon as possible to provide assurance that the concerns raised here are not more widespread.

As soon as possible there should to be an enquiry into the failings at Medway and the implications of this for the wider youth justice system.

Nick Hardwick
HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

On behalf of HMI Prisons and Ofsted

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