

## Oakhill secure training centre

Chalgrove Field  
Oakhill  
Milton Keynes  
MK5 6AJ

### Monitoring visit

Inspected under the secure training centres inspection framework.

### Information about this secure training centre

Oakhill secure training centre is operated by G4S Care and Justice Services. The centre provides accommodation for up to 80 male children aged 12 to 17 years who are serving a custodial sentence or who are remanded to custody by the courts. There were 46 children resident at the time of the monitoring visit.

Education is provided on site in dedicated facilities by G4S. Healthcare services are provided by G4S Health Services UK.

**Visit date:** 13 September 2021

### This monitoring visit

The joint inspectorates were commissioned by the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice to carry out this visit due to emerging concerns about the care and well-being of children.

The focus of this visit was to assess the day-to-day care and experiences of children to understand how much time children spend out of their room and what activities they were able to undertake.

This monitoring visit was unannounced. Inspectors found widespread failings that are having a significant impact on the care and well-being of children in the areas that were the focus of this visit.

1. Children's day-to-day experiences are very poor. Many children described to inspectors chaotic arrangements and general disorganisation at the centre. They said that they did not know what was happening from morning to afternoon, or from one day to the next. For example, children described activities being cancelled at the last minute. Usually, this was linked to a lack of staffing.

2. From mid-July 2021 to date, the centre's records show that children have spent approximately 19 hours per day on average locked in their rooms. On some days, this has increased to 23 hours. The Youth Custody Service (YCS) reported to inspectors that it questions the accuracy of the centre's data, indicating that the time children have spent locked into their rooms could be higher than that reported by the centre.
3. Staff told inspectors that their morale is very low and that they do not feel supported by managers. The centre's records show that, on the vast majority of days in July and August 2021, the minimum staffing levels to ensure the safe and appropriate care of children were not met. Additional staff have been brought in to work at the centre to try to supplement the depleted workforce. These staff are from a prison and a young offender's institution. It is too early to determine if this has had any measurable impact on children or the running of the centre.
4. The way in which centre staff encourage children to develop positive behaviours and social skills is in disarray. Some children told inspectors that they are able to intimidate staff in order to retain incentives that they have not earned and are not entitled to. The inspectorate's findings support children's views. Five of six children that inspectors spoke with who are on the lowest levels of the incentives scheme were seen to have items they should not have had. Records of incentive level reviews with children are poor. Many of the records were not signed by the children to indicate that they understand the objectives set for them. Inspectors observed children behaving poorly on one unit, with little intervention from staff.
5. The failure of managers and centre staff to implement appropriate and reasonable boundaries appears to be a contributing factor to a significant increase in violence, use of force and single separation (where children are locked into their rooms due to being a significant risk to themselves or others). Since the last inspection, these incidents have increased and are at an extremely high level.
6. Oversight of the use of force and conflict resolution had been undermined by specialist staff needing to be deployed to staff children's living units. While this is understandable, it has led to a backlog of use of force incidents that have not been reviewed. In addition, conflict resolution work with children has often taken far too long to commence and conclude.
7. The temperatures in children's living units and in other parts of the centre are too high. This leads to an environment in summer months that is not conducive to the positive care of children. Managers described the centre as having an air-circulation system that does not condition the air, and in some areas there is very limited ventilation. There was no means of cooling the children's living units or staff administration areas. This makes living and working at the centre very uncomfortable at best.
8. A proportion of education is taking place on living units and not in education classrooms. When children are locked into their bedrooms, education does not occur face to face but through a child's locked bedroom door. Poor practice on living units undermines education provision. For example, inspectors saw a unit leave education

because they did not like the lesson. Children were able to watch DVDs on living units instead of being engaged in education lessons.

9. Children’s health needs are assessed by the centre’s health team. Children are able to attend medical appointments. When children have been locked into their rooms, health staff have visited children on their living units to ensure that children’s physical health needs are met and to provide appropriate support.
10. The inspection team met with representatives from the YCS. The YCS is concerned about the failings at the centre. It has taken actions, including pausing placements and increased on-site monitoring of the centre’s performance. Despite this, little progress has been made when similar concerns, particularly those relating to staffing, were raised by inspectors at the previous inspection in May 2021.
11. There is a newly appointed interim temporary Director. The interim Director took up her post on 1 September 2021 for a maximum period of three months. She acknowledges the concerns and understands the challenges that need to be addressed. However, permanent leadership is not in place, but is essential to plan and implement positive, meaningful and lasting change for the vulnerable children at the centre.

## Recent Inspection History

<b>Inspection date</b>	<b>Inspection type</b>	<b>Inspection judgement</b>
24 May 2021	Monitoring visit	Not applicable
16 to 19 November 2020	Assurance visit	Not applicable
8 to 12 April 2019	Inspection	Requires improvement to be good
5 to 15 June 2018	Inspection	Requires improvement to be good

## **What needs to improve:**

### **Recommendations**

- Urgently establish appropriate staffing levels to provide effective and appropriate care for children; ensure that staff are provided with a good level of support.
- Ensure that children have a full daily routine, including full-time face-to-face education.
- Managers should urgently review the centre's behaviour incentive scheme and ensure that staff implement the scheme consistently and fairly for all children.
- Take effective action to address the high temperatures on living units and other areas of the centre.

## **Information about this inspection**

The purpose of this visit was to assess the day-to-day care and experiences of children to understand how much time children spend out of their room and what activities they were able to undertake.

The centre was inspected under the secure training centres inspection framework.

This inspection was carried out in accordance with Rule 43 of the Secure Training Centre Rules (produced in compliance with Section 47 of the Prison Act 1952, as amended by Section 6(2) of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994), Section 80 of the Children Act 1989. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's power to inspect secure training centres is provided by section 146 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

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## **Inspectors**

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