

Observations and additional findings from the inspection visit

Management

From the time the centre opened in August 2004 to January 2007 there had been 12 changes in the management team, a new head of psychology and changes in the chaplaincy plus two chaplains and a head of psychology. Since January 2007 the director had left the centre and a temporary interim director was appointed for an unspecified period of time. The post holder made clear his desire for this to be as brief a period as possible. He had been involved with the planning and development of the secure training centre and had previously acted as director.

The interim director is being supported by the custody and rehabilitation director for G4S (the parent company), the external line manager for the centre who spends three days a week at the establishment and takes a lead role on a number of matters. G4S has commissioned an employment agency to identify appropriate candidates for the post of Oakhill director. During this visit the external manager received a shortlist of potential candidates. However, this appointment could take several months given the length time needed to recruit, complete vetting and for the successful candidate to serve notice from his or her current post.

G4S has also commissioned the services of a management consultant to assist the interim director and external manager to create a development plan for the centre, which includes strategies for addressing previous recommendations made by inspectors and for meeting the expectations of the YJB. This support is regarded as positive by the manager.

Since January there have been three significant appointments; a new head of children's services, a security operations manager and the child protection and offending behaviour manager. Previous post holders have either left the centre or have been redeployed to do other tasks. All new staff have undergone an induction programme with G4S and have been in post for a short period of time. The three managers provided inspectors with evidence of their priorities, the progress they had made in their particular departments and set out their vision for further development of the service.

Of particular concern to inspectors is the fact that of the entire senior management team only the commercial manager, responsible for finance and contracts, has been at the centre since it opened. The majority of the key management posts have been held by more than one person. In less than three years the turnover of managers at all levels was so high it was inevitable that the consistency in the standards and quality of care provided to young people would suffer, as reflected in all reports since then.

The turnover of residential care (custody) staff has been exceptionally high with an annual attrition rate of 48%. Efforts have been made to deal with

staff absence and to challenge poor practice, resulting in a number of employment contracts being terminated. However, the high turnover of staff is symptomatic of the lack of clear and consistent management direction and support. This is confirmed by a number of staff interviewed who say they do not have confidence in the middle or senior management teams. There is a general acknowledgment from staff that the new members of the senior management team are attempting to deal with the many issues facing them in their role as residential care staff working with some extremely challenging and complex young people. The new head of children's services has identified the need to ensure that all staff receive regular formal supervision, but some of the staff interviewed had received little or no supervision and this is extremely worrying.

Staff are anxious about their deployment around the centre and the numbers available to work directly with the young people; they have provided examples of times they find themselves feeling concerned about being able to manage situations. Inspectors were concerned that one member of staff was reported to be left alone with five young people in a living unit.

All of these issues have been raised in previous inspection reports and continue to be of concern to Ofsted and the YJB.

The interim director and his staff are pleased to report that the staffing establishment for the centre was increased, just two days prior to the inspection, by an additional nine residential care staff. The staffing rotas have also recently been revised to avoid long shifts for those staff who do not wish to work them. The current initial training course (ITC), when concluded on 28 May 2007, should provide an additional 21 staff to work with young people. If this has been done, the centre will have filled all vacancies and additional staff made available. The interim director was confident that this would allow staff to participate in 'learning circles' for training purposes and to attend supervision regularly.

The quality of management information in Oakhill and how this is used to inform managers about practice, monitor standards, maintain contract compliance and to influence development is underdeveloped. The management of the living units is generally poor. Although there are some examples of good practice, an inconsistent approach to the setting of expectations, monitoring of practice and providing support to staff, is evident throughout the centre. This has the effect of lowering staff morale and retarding the plans to improve practice at the centre.

The newly constituted senior management team has produced a development plan and is identifying areas requiring urgent attention and prioritising other areas for development. The role of the residential service manager has been reviewed and some changes made, but further consideration is being given to roles and responsibilities of other staff in the senior team. Senior managers appear to have accepted that having a residential service manager involved in

the direct management and organisation of the living units is crucial for the consistency of practice and service delivery.

Staying Safe

The quality of recordings is generally poor and this, coupled with the lack of consistent sharing of information and effective communication processes across the centre, inevitably has an impact on the safeguarding of young people. Inspectors saw a number of examples of poor recording and there were instances when no recording had taken place. They also witnessed and were concerned about the inadequate sharing of information during the period of the visit, which in some instances leaves young people and staff vulnerable and at risk. For example, the healthcare department delayed sharing the information provided on admission with care staff for a young person and their initial assessment of risk. In another instance staff were unable to check on a young person in her bedroom for at least half an hour, because a manager's action resulted in the locking of doors which care staff did not have keys to open.

Young people were seen 'play fighting' with each other and inappropriately pushing staff. They were not consistently challenged about this behaviour. The so-called 'play fighting' resulted in at least two instances where young people were hurt by another young person. The potential for this to lead to bullying and harassment is clear and managers need to ensure that the centre's own policy on this is adhered to consistently. The management of the mealtimes in the dining room continues to be a concern and is being highlighted once again by inspectors. The absence of a senior staff member to monitor and direct the mealtimes resulted in young people behaving inappropriately, which could lead to a significant incident.

The views of young people reflect that they are not confident in how the complaints system is managed. Young people's views vary regarding the behaviour management policy; they are critical of the lack of consistency from staff in its application. Although some young people acknowledge good interaction with staff, the majority spoken with feel that staff do not interact in leisure activities as they should. For example it is stated: 'they do not always join in and make it fun'. The quality of the food provided is reported as 'OK' to 'poor'.

The centre has introduced a new incentive scheme and efforts are being made in the education centre to address young people's behaviour. However, once again the inconsistent application of boundaries and consequences for behaviour, alongside a rewards scheme, has resulted in a number of incidents, or 'concerted indiscipline' which resulted in the centre receiving penalty awards from the YJB.

It is apparent that some staff either lack the ability or the confidence to challenge the behaviour of some young people. Given that they are working

with relatively large groups of adolescents who are often angry and frustrated by the circumstances in which they find themselves and vent these feelings on the adults around them, it is inevitable that they will be required to deal with challenging and aggressive behaviour.

All care staff receive training in Physical Care and Control (PCC), which is the approved behaviour management and restrictive physical intervention method, prior to working directly with young people. However, a significant number of staff say they feel the initial training does not adequately prepare them for the practical aspects of working with young people, particularly in understanding emotional issues and their impact on behaviour.

Staff are also clear that they need support, guidance and direction from managers to help them with the difficult task of managing the behaviour of the young people.

Inspectors observed a number of staff deal with potentially volatile situations with young people and handle these very well. However, inspectors also observed several staff after they had dealt with a very difficult and violent situation without any immediate debriefing from managers. Several staff say they are rarely debriefed by managers, but feel they support each other well.

The management of the behaviour of young people placed in a secure setting is crucial to ensure the safety of the young people and the staff working at the centre. The inconsistent practices of both managers and staff at times, and the deficiencies in training as identified by staff, have an impact upon their ability to maintain good order and control. The lack of supervision and inconsistent adherence to policies and procedural practices could all potentially impact on the expectations of the centre to 'safeguard' young people.

Overall Conclusion

The inspection report from January 2007 referred to the reports of the four previous inspections that had made recommendations intended to improve practice and raise the standard of the service. It was acknowledged by the senior manager from G4S at that time that progress had been limited. It was anticipated that the pending appointment of the three new senior managers would deliver the improvements necessary both operationally and strategically. However, at that time the departure of the director was not anticipated.

The three-year development plan sets out the framework for improvement. Individual managers and departments are responsible for addressing specific areas and for reporting back to the management team. Progress on the delivery of the development plan is monitored by G4S and the YJB are informed of progress. This is a detailed development plan, which covers most aspects of the work of the different disciplines within the centre. However,

there is little evidence of information gathered from records, reports and other sources, being used to inform development at the centre. A number of the outcome/evidence areas in the document are general and do not indicate sufficiently how progress will be measured.

Inspectors have evidence to show that there has been progress in that eight of the 34 recommendations have been met. Two of those relate to education and have not been verified by an HMI education inspector. Some aspects of other recommendations have been partly addressed, but a number of areas have not yet seen any significant change. This continues to be an unacceptable response to recommendations that support minimum standards.

The recent changes within the senior management team with the appointment of experienced staff, the investment in additional staffing and the provision of opportunities for training and supervision, are all acknowledged as positive. A number of staff and managers commented on progress in the healthcare centre and in particular the contribution made by the head of healthcare.

The efforts by the learning centre (school) to encourage young people to develop their creative skills have resulted in a number of young people receiving positive recognition for their art work and catering skills. The recent decision to place young people in 'banding' streams, rather than simply in their living groups, is a significant development for the young people and every effort is being made to improve their educational attainment during their stay at the centre. Their progress post-resettlement is monitored by the education link team, who keep other colleagues informed of the outcomes for young people.

The roles and responsibilities of the different managers at the centre are not apparent to care staff, who often feel unsupported. They cite lack of availability of managers to support them with difficult situations. This has been a continuing theme during inspections at this secure training centre and considerable work is needed to improve the confidence of staff in managers. This needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency if the attrition rate of care staff is to be reduced.

The young people questioned say they feel safe at the centre, although some shared with inspectors concerns about bullying and harassment. There is evidence that any potential child protection matters identified are addressed appropriately. However, 'safeguarding' in the general sense could be compromised by any number of the deficiencies in practices and procedures identified in this report. The management of young people's behaviour and the requirement to maintain good order and control is a crucial aspect of 'safeguarding', particularly in an establishment the size of Oakhill.

The prospects for improvement are uncertain at present, particularly as a new director has yet to be appointed and three senior managers have been in post

for only a matter of weeks. Although progress is acknowledged in this report, it is difficult to measure how well this will be sustained, or embedded in the practice of the centre.

The senior managers were informed that the next annual inspection will take place in October 2007, when progress will once again be assessed. The external manager from G4S feels this is an appropriate period for the STC to be able to demonstrate sustained progress against the recommendations and further development across the different services. Senior managers were informed that several additional recommendations have been added on the attached matrix.

The YJB will continue to monitor compliance with the contract and with national standards for youth justice.