

18 June 2021

By email:
secofstate@justice.gov.uk

The Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC MP
Justice Secretary

Amanda Spielman
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

Dear Secretary of State

Urgent Notification: Rainsbrook Secure Training Centre

I am writing to you about the findings of the recent inspection of Rainsbrook STC that ended on 11 June 2021. The concerns that the joint inspectorates found are serious. As a result, in accordance with the joint inspection framework for secure training centres (STCs) that refers to the protocol between HM Chief Inspector of Prisons and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), we intend to invoke the Urgent Notification (UN) process.

In the UN issued on 16 December 2020 there were serious concerns that newly admitted children were being locked into their bedrooms for a 14-day period and only allowed out each day for 30 minutes. This matter has been addressed and the Youth Custody Service (YCS) has strengthened its oversight of the STC. However, this recent inspection has found a deterioration and there are serious and widespread concerns about the care and safety of children, leadership and staffing. The STC is unsafe for children and staff.

Key findings from this latest inspection include:

- Leadership and management are ineffective. Poor and unsafe staff practice is not being appropriately addressed. The disconnect between the senior leadership team and centre-wide staff teams has increased since the monitoring visit in January. The director and his senior leadership team are not visible to staff and children, failing to provide them with guidance and reassurance.
- Children and staff told inspectors that they did not feel safe and feared that a child or staff member is going to die or to be seriously harmed.
- Children told inspectors that frequent incidents of racism and transphobic abuse are not challenged by staff and that this has led to fights and incidents.

Physical assaults between children are common. Children are able to bully and intimidate each other. Levels of violence and the use of force remain very high.

- The STC is unable to recruit and retain sufficient staff with the skills and experience suitable to the care of vulnerable children. Staffing levels are variable, and often a unit will only have one member of staff on duty. The lack of staffing capacity is significant and continues to have a detrimental impact on the safety and care for children at the centre.
- Children's plans are not always known by or adhered to by staff, and staff cannot access important information about children's health needs or risks that relate to safety and wellbeing. This places children at risk of serious harm.
- Poor staff practice and/or safeguarding concerns result in 'additional training' or 'supervision' for the staff concerned. However, these measures are ineffective leading to repeated poor practice.
- Education provision is poor, and evidence of the achievement and progress of children is lacking. The centre has been slow to address teaching staff vacancies. Inspectors observed instances of aggression that took too long to de-escalate, making the learning environment unsafe. On two occasions, children were seen locked in classrooms unsupervised.
- There have been many occasions where children have not been taken to medical appointments or have been taken late, and as a result are sometimes refused treatment. On many occasions children are going without their prescribed medication, risking their health.
- Lapses in security and safety procedures place children and staff at risk. Searching procedures are poorly applied meaning appropriate actions are not taken when children have contraband items on their person. There has been an increase in contraband items found during staff searches with prohibited items being bought into the STC. These matters potentially place children, staff and visitors at considerable risk of harm.

As required by the protocol referenced in the joint inspection framework, we have set out the key evidence underpinning the decision to invoke the UN process. We have informed the Director of Rainsbrook STC, the Executive Director of the YCS and officials of the MoJ of our decision. We will publish an inspection report shortly.

The decision to invoke the UN process in relation to STCs is determined by the judgement of the chief inspectors of Ofsted, HMIP and CQC. This decision is informed by relevant factors evidence during the inspection, as set out in the Protocol between HM Chief Inspector and the MoJ, and may include:

- Poor healthy prison test assessments (HMI Prisons’ inspection methodology is outlined in the HMI Prisons Inspection Framework)
- The pattern of the healthy prison test judgements
- Repeated poor assessments
- The type of prison and the risks presented
- The vulnerability of those detained
- The failure to achieve recommendations
- The Inspectorate’s confidence in the prison’s capacity for change and improvement.

The joint inspection framework for STCs sets out that this letter will be placed in the public domain, and that the Secretary of State commits to responding publicly to the concerns raised within 28 calendar days. The response should explain how the safety, care, and wellbeing of children at the STC will be improved in both the immediate and longer term.

Inspections of Rainsbrook STC since 2015

We have inspected/visited Rainsbrook STC on ten occasions since February 2015 (including the most recent inspection).

Inspection Judgements 2015¹ -2020		
	Overall effectiveness (before 2019) Overall experiences and progress of children and young people (after 2020)	The Effectiveness of Leadership and Management (introduced to the inspection framework from sept 2015)
February 2015	Inadequate	
September 2015	Requires improvement to be good	Requires improvement to be good
October 2016	Required improvement to be good	Inadequate
June 2017	Requires improvement to be good	Inadequate

¹ [Secure training centres inspection framework](#)

October 2018	Requires improvement to be good	Requires improvement to be good
February 2020	Requires Improvement to be good	Requires improvement to be good

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted, HMIP and CQC suspended inspections of STCs in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we carried out assurance visits to STCs in the period until 31 March 2021.²

NB Monitoring visits do not have an inspection judgement.

Visits 2020/21		
October 2020	Assurance visit	Serious and widespread concerns
December 2020	Monitoring visit	(Urgent notification invoked)
January 2021	Monitoring visit	(Some early signs of improvement. However, much of the action plan yet to be implemented)

We would draw your attention to the consistent poor findings and the lack of progress made.

We do not underestimate the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic presents for the leaders and staff at Rainsbrook STC. However, this does not excuse the failings the inspectorates have found.

We have decided to invoke the UN because the STC is unsafe for children and staff, and due to continuing poor care and the failure of leadership at the STC to identify weaknesses and drive meaningful improvement. Since 2015, the centre has been judged 'requires improvement to be good' with the effectiveness of leaders and managers being judged 'inadequate' on two occasions. This most recent inspection has seen significant decline with the centre judged as 'inadequate'. This provides very little confidence in the centre's capacity to improve the safety, care and wellbeing of children.

We would appreciate an expedient response providing assurance of the immediate safety of children and about the long-term, sustainable improvement to provide good quality safe care for children at Rainsbrook STC.

² [Assurance visits: secure training centres](#)

Yours sincerely

Amanda Spielman

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