

Consultation Team
Ofsted
Social Care Development Team Floor
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Tuesday 26 June 2012

Dear Sir/ Madam

Ofsted consultation on the inspection of secure training centres

I am writing on behalf of The Communication Trust to offer our views on the Ofsted consultation on the Inspection of Secure Training Centres.

There is strong evidence which outlines the high incidence of communication needs in this context. This consistently shows that at least 60% of young people in the youth justice system are likely to have communication needs. However, for the vast majority, these needs have never been identified. These facts will impact on several aspects of this consultation; we felt it best to set these out in a letter. The Communication Trust works to support the youth justice workforce to increase their knowledge and understanding of communication needs and we would be delighted to meet to discuss how this work could be used to support Ofsted's inspection of secure training centres.

The Communication Trust is a coalition organisation bringing together over 40 voluntary and community sector organisations with expertise in children's speech, language and communication. Supported by the Department for Education, BT and other funders, much of the Trust's projects to date involve improving the understanding of the children and young people's workforce of speech, language and communication needs and promoting relevant resources for practitioners working in Early Years, Primary and Secondary education.

However, an increasingly important area of the Trust's work is targeting those working in the youth justice system, which has within it a disproportionately high percentage of children and young people with unrecognised and un-met communication needs. For reference you may wish to view our new film (www.sentencetrouble.info/film) aimed at youth justice practitioners, which features a number of experts from the youth justice field.

As you may recall, John Berrow's Independent Review into Services for Children and Young People (0-19) with Speech, Language and Communication Needs found that there is a need for the workforce to develop a set of core skills in children's and young people's speech, language and communication needs. Research on juvenile offenders in the UK has found that 66-90% (depending on the exact sub-test) have below average speech, language and communication skills on standardised tests. This often also prevents them from benefiting from verbally mediated interventions such as education and offender behaviour work and, if not addressed, can contribute to re-offending. The Trust believes there is therefore a real need to ensure the entire workforce, including Ofsted's inspectors working in this area, are trained to support and identify those with SLCN.

Of particular relevance is the proposal in the consultation document that inspectors make judgements on the behaviour of young people. As mentioned above, communication needs impact greatly on the behaviour of children and young people. A significant proportion of young people in secure training centres will have difficulties in understanding what is being said to them and in making themselves understood. This can lead to frustration and inappropriate behaviour, often where they are masking their communication difficulties. For example, a young person may become aggressive or unresponsive to questioning because they are unable to understand what they are being asked or are unable to effectively get their point across.

Working with the Youth Justice Board the Trust has been delivering communication needs workshop training to staff across the secure estate including at Hassockfield Secure Training Centre. The Trust is also talking to Oakhill Secure Training Centre about piloting interventions that help defuse tense situations through using effective communication. However, the Trust would recommend that training and resources be made regularly available across all secure training centres to ensure that staff are able to recognise where communication needs exist and have the strategies to support the young people they work with. The Trust's training showed that there existed some limited knowledge of communication needs within the secure estate. However, following training staff showed greater understanding of how the process of communicating works, what is meant by communication needs, the relationship between language and behaviour and the importance of effective communication in their roles. Staff also showed greater confidence in recognising what communication needs may look like, where a young person may have communication needs and in using strategies to support them.

The consultation document also proposes an emphasis on consultation with young people to ensure their safety, well-being and improved behaviour and attainment. In order to achieve this, it is vital that staff understand the role of communication needs fully within their context, and that they have the skills to identify and meet young people's communication needs through appropriate training and information for the workforce.

We believe this requirement should be set out in the proposed judgements. For example, under the judgement on 'safety of young people' in order to be judged 'outstanding', secure training centres must demonstrate that they consult with young people. We would propose that the wording of this and similar judgments should reflect the importance of meeting the communication needs of young people, for example, 'young people are consistently consulted **with demonstrable consideration of their communication needs**, leading to a child-centred culture that influences service delivery.'

As you will be aware, the new Framework for The School Inspection brought in from January 2012 puts a great emphasis for the first time on 'communication skills'; this same principle should be brought to the inspection of secure training centres.

We would be delighted to discuss the issues raised in this letter in further detail and the solutions The Communication Trust can provide. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

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Professional Director

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