

Admission and discharge from secure accommodation

This report evaluates the processes of admission, and discharge and resettlement into the community, of young people placed within the secure estate. It examines factors that help or constrain effective practice and makes recommendations for improvement.

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Executive summary

This report evaluates the quality of admission, assessment, care planning and service delivery in secure establishments and the effectiveness of arrangements for discharging and resettling young people into the community. The evidence was drawn from visits between July 2009 and January 2010 to 16 secure children's homes and four secure training centres, and responses to interviews and questionnaires by managers, specialist staff, young people and their families. A total of 407 people contributed to the survey, including 175 young people.

Young people can be placed in a secure setting for welfare reasons, under section 25 of the Children Act 1989, or placed there by a court, on remand or to serve a sentence. Restricting young people's liberty by admitting them to a secure establishment is a serious step – a last resort – and young people released from secure placements frequently go on to reoffend.

In the case of those admitted for welfare reasons, there was substantial consultation with families and social workers beforehand. This was in marked contrast to arrangements for admitting those sentenced by the courts, where admissions often took place after office hours, when it was difficult to obtain relevant information about the young person. Young people in this position often did not know where they were being taken, and parents were not informed until their children had arrived at the placement. The anxieties caused by this were often exacerbated by the distance between the placement and the young person's home.

The Youth Justice Board's target that at least 90% of young people in secure settings should be within 50 miles of home was discontinued in 2009. Inspectors met many young people who were more than 200 miles away from their families. Distant placements restricted the number of visits by families and increased the young people's unhappiness and sense of vulnerability. Distance also limited the extent to which families could be directly involved in planning and reviews. The main reasons for this situation were the lack of local placements and the concentration of specialist resources in a small number of centres.

Once the young people had been admitted to a secure establishment, staff generally worked closely with them, their families and other agencies to assess needs, provide appropriate support and make timely plans for their reintegration into the community. Two factors which detracted from this process were the variations in quality of provision within and between services, and the failure of some local authorities to meet their obligations to support and resettle young people who were being released from custody. The impact of this was seen during and after the time spent in the secure establishments.

Planned support from the establishments usually stopped at the point when the young person was discharged. Although case managers from the secure establishment attended the first post-discharge review, they had no subsequent role to support young people in implementing the agreed plans. Inspectors met young

people who had not been provided with the support, training and accommodation that they were promised and whose reintegration had subsequently failed.

Although the National Standards for Youth Justice Services clearly outline the responsibilities of secure establishments and youth offending teams, social workers and members of youth offending teams were often insufficiently involved in transitional planning.¹ It was clear that the work of secure establishments was often undermined by the absence of appropriate consultation following sentencing, lack of continuity of approach before admission and after release, and the failure to deliver good enough support after young people were discharged. Unless these factors are tackled systematically, the rates of reoffending and re-referral among young people are unlikely to fall.

Key findings

- The extent to which organisations such as youth offending teams, schools and colleges could work successfully with young people in secure settings was severely limited by the insufficient number and range of appropriate secure placements.
- Work between professionals and the families of young people who were sentenced or remanded by a court was very limited until the placement had been made.
- All the secure establishments visited engaged themselves with other agencies very quickly and effectively once a young person was admitted.
- Many young people were placed a long distance from their home, and some parents had to make journeys of hundreds of miles to visit their children.
- These young people were unlikely to have the same level of support as those who were placed locally, on either admission or discharge from the secure setting. This adversely affected plans for successful transfer and reintegration into the community.
- Secure establishments used assessment, planning and review effectively, which included involving other organisations as well as the young people and their families.
- Young people generally received good emotional support, and the relationships between young people, their families and staff within the secure establishments were very positive.
- It was common for agreed discharge arrangements for young people not to be in place until the last days of the placement.
- Social workers and workers from youth offending teams did not participate sufficiently in planning for young people to move back into the community.

¹ For further information, see:
www.yjb.gov.uk/publications/Scripts/prodView.asp?idproduct=466&eP=

- Staff in secure placements were usually unable to make significant continuing contributions to planning or services for young people after they were discharged.

Recommendations

The Youth Justice Board should:

- review the range, number and location of secure placements within the estate to ensure that young people:
 - are placed as close as is practicably possible to their home
 - maintain contact with their families
 - have appropriate vocational and work experiences
 - have continuity of care before, during and after admission
- involve and consult the appropriate youth offending teams, secure establishments, social workers and the families about the most appropriate placement of young people sentenced or on remand
- consider the cost implications of placing young people a long distance from their homes and seek to achieve better value for money.

Local authorities responsible for placing children and young people within the secure estate should:

- wherever possible, seek to involve parents and families in decision-making when young people are to be placed on a 'welfare' order and give due regard to their opinions
- ensure that young people who are entitled to support under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 receive the services they require during their placement within a secure establishment
- ensure that young people moving out of secure settings have a guaranteed education or training place arranged for them
- ensure that firm discharge plans, based on the assessed need of the individual young person, are in place sufficiently early to enable transitional work with any new placement or facilities.

Secure establishments should:

- consider, at all reviews, how young people may be supported throughout their placement and during the immediate period following their discharge to home or to another placement
- ensure that each child or young person placed in a secure setting is allocated a named worker to provide personal support throughout their placement and during the period of transition.

Introduction

1. Between 2003 and 2007, over 70% of 10–17-year-olds who had been released from secure accommodation committed further offences.² While the total number of young offenders receiving immediate custodial sentences has remained relatively constant since 2000, the proportion of those who have previously been sentenced three or more times for very serious offences doubled from 7.7% in 2000 to 15% in 2008 (Table 1).³ While offending behaviour is likely to be caused by a wide range of factors, it is clear that the services currently received by young people placed in secure settings are not preventing reoffending.

Table 1: Juvenile offenders in England and Wales receiving immediate custodial sentences for indictable offences by the number of previous immediate custodial sentences, 2000–08 (number and percentage of offenders)

Number of previous custodial sentences	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
0	62.3	60.7	58.1	56.2	54.4	53.8	53.8	54.0	54.9
1	20.6	21.5	20.3	21.4	21.4	20.2	20.7	20.5	19.5
2	9.4	9.9	10.7	10.5	10.9	11.3	10.9	11.1	10.6
3+	7.7	7.9	11.0	11.9	13.3	14.7	14.7	14.4	15.0
All offenders (100%)	6,227	6,264	6,346	5,772	6,371	6,361	6,718	6,729	6,487

2. This survey evaluated:
 - the quality of the processes for admission, assessment, care planning and service delivery in secure establishments
 - the effectiveness of the arrangements for discharging young people and resettling them into the community.

Admission to the secure estate

3. Children and young people are admitted to a secure setting for one of two reasons:
 - they can be placed there for ‘welfare’ reasons, under section 25 of the Children Act 1989, if their behaviour is placing themselves or others at significant risk.

² Response to parliamentary question, 1 September 2009; See also Annex B.

<http://services.parliament.uk/hansard/Commons/ByDate/20090901/writtenanswers/part001.html>.

³ The data have been taken from the annual National Statistics on long-term trends in sentencing in England and Wales (chapter 6). For further information, see:

www.justice.gov.uk/publications/sentencingannual.htm.

- they can be placed there on remand or to serve a sentence.
4. In the first case, local authorities liaise directly with secure children's homes to identify appropriate welfare placements. In the second case, the decision to place a young person in a particular establishment is based on an assessment by the Youth Justice Board which takes account of their age and level of vulnerability.
 5. Managers of secure children's homes have considerable discretion in admitting young people on welfare orders. They can refuse admission if they consider that the placement is not in the interest of the young person or of others already in the home, although this would have to be justified to the relevant local authority. The timescale involved allows for dialogue and pre-admission planning between the placing authority and the secure unit, and for detailed consideration of the key factors likely to make the placement successful. There is also scope for engaging parents and a range of support agencies.
 6. This contrasts with the arrangements for admitting young people who have been sentenced or remanded by the courts. When young people are sentenced by the courts, the decisions are made by the Youth Justice Board and there is little leeway for managers to make a case for refusal. For court-ordered secure remands and young people remanded to custody, the local authority is the placing authority and the Youth Justice Board acts as a broker by providing information on vacancies and negotiating with the secure establishments on behalf of the local authority.
 7. During this survey, managers of establishments that specialised in 'welfare' placements said that, at the referral stage, they received good information that enabled them to make an accurate assessment of a young person's needs. However, when a referral was made by the Youth Justice Board, there was limited consultation with the receiving institution. Managers are usually sent available information, including the 'eAsset' assessment, and given 30 minutes to respond.⁴ Some managers felt that this gave them too little time to make a considered response. There were also concerns about the quality, accuracy and currency of some of the information included in the referral. Most of the young people were admitted from court, often outside office hours, when social workers or supervisors from youth offending teams were not available to provide up-to-date information. In two of the establishments visited during the survey, health and education staff were critical of the specialist information that they received because it was rarely detailed enough for them to make accurate assessments.

⁴ 'eAsset' is the online version of the Youth Justice Board's framework for assessing all young people involved in the criminal justice system. For further information, see: www.yjb.gov.uk/en-gb/practitioners/Informationsharingandtechnology/eAsset/.

8. At times, the managers surveyed had tried to refuse a referral because they did not consider it to be in the best interest of the young person or of the others already placed with them. A lack of alternative placements could also lead to problems, as illustrated here:

A resettlement worker reported that social workers and youth offending teams from nearby local authorities tried to place young people at his secure children's home because this helped maintain contact with the families. However, other authorities also placed young people there because there were no other secure centres available. In some cases, young people had been placed there from 200 miles away. When these types of arrangements had been proposed, the duty officers had challenged their suitability, drawing on information in the Asset report, but this did not affect the decision.

9. Managers and resettlement staff at the establishments, together with workers from youth offending teams, were aware of the option to transfer a young person if a placement was judged to be unacceptable. The Youth Justice Board tried to be helpful in such cases. However, because of limited vacancies within the secure estate, the process could take time. Three managers cited examples of young people who had begun to settle into their establishments by the time more suitable placements had been found. In these cases, it was decided not to continue with the transfers because, at that point, on balance they would not have been in the best interests of the young people in spite of the difficulties caused by distance.

Consultation with professionals, families and young people

10. The extent to which professionals were consulted over placements varied. Social workers confirmed that they were usually involved and consulted when secure 'welfare' placements were being planned, although sometimes this consultation was with their local authority placement team and not directly with the secure establishment.
11. Consultation with youth offending teams was limited. Workers spoken to during seven survey visits said that they were not consulted about the placement of the young people they supervised. Three other workers reported that they were not routinely consulted but they could make recommendations on the Youth Justice 'placement alert' form before a young person appeared in court. Where the accommodation was available, it was quite common for the recommended placement to be made. However, ultimately the decisions necessary at the time of placing a young person were made by the Youth Justice Board without any reference to the social workers or youth offending teams.
12. There is an expectation that parents of children and young people placed on welfare orders under section 25 of the Children Act 1989 will be consulted about placements and encouraged to participate, as far as possible, in the planning, delivery and review of services.

13. It was not uncommon for social workers, when placing young people for welfare reasons, to discuss the proposed placement with parents or carers beforehand. However, in the case of placements on remand or to serve a sentence, families were very rarely consulted. As a result, they often had no idea where the young person had been taken until a worker from the youth offending team or someone from the secure establishment contacted them. Similarly, young people described not knowing where they were being taken once they left court and not finding out until they arrived at the placement and were told by staff managing their admission. Not only did this cause considerable distress to those concerned, but it also meant that planning the appropriate support could not start until the young person had arrived at the secure establishment.⁵

A young person felt that the placement was 'not very well' planned in terms of distance from home. A visit from his parents necessitated a journey of over 200 miles each way. He had only had one visit in four months. His mother was disabled and had to travel by public transport. It was also difficult for her to arrange childcare for the other children in the family.

14. Despite the lack of consultation beforehand, families and professionals were usually very closely involved in the process once the young person had been admitted to the secure establishment. The parents who contributed to the survey were generally satisfied with the speed with which they were contacted by staff at the placement and by the information they were given. They appreciated the way that their children were allowed to telephone home to say that they had arrived safely. They were all highly complimentary about the welcome and hospitality that they received when they visited and about the attitude of staff towards them. However, they did not always receive practical advice about places to stay that were at or near the establishment.
15. Of the 73 young people who completed the survey questionnaire, all were satisfied with the way that the centres treated their families during visits. The young people were also satisfied with the support that they were given to keep in contact with approved family members and friends, social workers and members of the youth offending teams.

Scarcity of appropriate placements

16. A recurring theme in the survey was the limited availability of appropriate placements for young people. Social workers described the conflicts that this could create. For example, a placement near home, to allow for continuing family contact and eventual reintegration, was often desirable. However, when, as in the case of one young woman, only two places in the country offered the

⁵ There is no legal requirement to consult young people beforehand about where they will be placed and there is no guidance on good practice in this area.

specialist single-sex support for girls who might self-harm required, it was difficult to find a local specialist placement.

17. Managers of three of the secure establishments described the difficulties that they could encounter when a young person was referred from another region. First, it limited the extent to which they could work effectively with families and key professionals from within the placing authority. Second, they found it very challenging to meet a young person's needs, especially when local specialist services did not have the capacity to deal with additional cases from outside the area. Ofsted reported on similar difficulties in its survey of mental health services for looked after children who are accommodated in residential settings.⁶

A manager emphasised the importance of effective links between services because, for example, many young people referred to secure settings have complex needs and a number of different professionals need to work with them. If a young person was receiving psychiatric or psychological services in their home area, it would not be possible to continue the services because of the distance involved. In addition, a service at or near the secure establishment might be reluctant to take on a project, knowing that the work could not be continued once the young person had left. Consequently, a young person's needs were not met.

18. In 2009, following a decline in the numbers of young people in custody, the Youth Justice Board carried out a tendering process for secure children's home places. This involved a detailed analysis to determine supply and demand in this sector and to ensure that the appropriate number and types of beds were commissioned in a cost-effective way. This sought to take into account the critical factors for successful placement when placing young people in custody. The survey found good evidence that the Youth Justice Board considered young people's needs very carefully when considering a placement. However, the options were limited by the availability of places. A secure establishment could be asked to admit a young person simply because it had a vacancy rather than because it was suitable.
19. In 2004, the Youth Justice Board's target was to ensure that at least 90% of young people placed in secure settings were no more than 50 miles from their home. By 2009, the 50-mile target had been abandoned. In the survey, respondents repeatedly highlighted the problems caused by distance, including:
- the impact on the young person's happiness and well-being
 - the difficulties for families in arranging visits

⁶ *An evaluation of the provision of mental health services for looked after young people over 16 accommodated in residential settings (080260)*, Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080260.

- the increased sense of vulnerability felt by the young person because they were in an unfamiliar place with a different local culture.

The head of the programmes team at one centre felt that some staff might have become 'desensitised' to the feelings and anxieties of young people and their families when they were placed many miles from home in a strange area with a different local subculture, where the staff 'talk funny'. She and her team tried to tackle this routinely in their work.

The director of a secure training centre with a catchment area of the entire north of England, and which also admitted young people from other parts of the country, felt that placing young people so far from their home areas had a considerable impact on the resettlement work that the centre was able to do and the support that youth offending teams and social workers could give to young people. It was very difficult for the centre to engage with the workers from youth offending teams and community professionals, and for staff to have any understanding of the young person's home community or circumstances.

20. Parents and families were supportive of the placements, once they were reassured that they were meeting their children's needs.

Two parents summed up the views of other families. They had not been involved in the decision about the location of their child's placement. However, both felt that their children were receiving good support and help while in the unit although visiting was not easy for either of them. One parent undertook a 400-mile round trip to visit the unit; the other had a trip of 140 miles.

Managers, social workers, youth offending teams, families and young people all identified local placements as being potentially far more positive and effective in meeting young people's needs. When young people were placed a long distance from home, this often created significant difficulties for social workers and other professionals in keeping in touch with them. A deputy manager's statistics showed that the average distance from home for a child placed at the secure establishment was 63 miles. However, 55% of the young people were from within 50 miles of the establishment. When a young person left, the resettlement worker attended reviews for all young people who lived within the 50-mile radius, but he was not able to do this for those who lived further away.

One mother said that she could not praise the place enough. She came from a nearby local authority. The support from staff and their commitment to her son's needs had resulted in his placement being successful, and he had now been discharged to home; he was attending college and staying out of trouble.

Another parent said that she had discussed the placement with a worker from the youth offending team before her son's appearance in court. It was the placement recommended by the worker because it was the closest to home and easiest to travel to.

A third parent agreed that the placement was appropriate for her son. Her family lived locally and her son had connections with a local professional football team. She had not known where he would be placed until she received a telephone call from the secure establishment to say he had arrived. However, she was pleased that the centre encouraged and supported her son to improve and maintain his links with the football club.

21. However, parents and families often experienced considerable hardship in trying to visit their children and participate in the planning and review processes. Where this resulted in reduced contact, this caused the young person additional distress and unhappiness.
22. The young people interviewed during the survey had very different experiences of their contacts with social workers and members of youth offending teams. They were quick to identify those whom they thought did not visit or support them well enough.

One young person said that he had had no contact with his social worker and meetings did not take place. A second young person had received a visit from the social worker twice a month while a third young person received a visit weekly. Another did not have a social worker but had been allocated a youth offending team worker, although the latter had only visited once in two and a half months.

23. Young people placed in secure establishments may also include 'looked after' children.⁷ Not hearing from a social worker 'for months' was also one of the examples that children in care gave of being treated unfairly in a report by the Children's Rights Director for England.⁸ An earlier report from him recorded that 'social workers were the most usual source of advice and personal information overall for the children in care [in the survey]'.⁹

⁷ There are no national data for the proportion of young people in custody who have previously been looked after. However, a report from the Youth Justice Board indicated that 24% of the 1,046 young men and 49% of the 54 young women surveyed reported being in care at some point. For further information, see: D Tye, *Children and young people in custody 2008–2009 – an analysis of the experiences of 15–18-year-olds in prison*, HM Inspectorate of Prisons (Youth Justice Board), 2009. www.justice.gov.uk/inspectorates/hmi-prisons/thematic-reports-and-research.htm

⁸ *Fairness and unfairness: a report of children's views by the Children's Rights Director for England* (090116), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090116.

⁹ *Getting advice: a report of children's experience by the Children's Rights Director for England* (080274), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080274.

24. It was clear that distant placements reduced the flexibility of social workers and others in being available for meetings or being able to respond to situations that needed their attention during placements. There were also greater costs in terms of time and travel to such placements.

Provision within the establishments

Working with families

25. Once a young person arrived at a centre, staff involved with managing their care worked very quickly and effectively to engage themselves with the family. The staff made early contact with parents and carers and provided very detailed, user-friendly information and guidance to help them become closely involved in the processes of assessment, planning the delivery of services, and review.
26. The survey found evidence of some good efforts to help families maintain contact with their children and to overcome the problems of distance. These included:
- arranging taxis for families
 - providing refreshments for them
 - letting family members stay for several hours with the young people
 - altering meeting times to fit in with transport arrangements
 - providing financial and emotional support to families.
27. Young people and their families were highly appreciative of such efforts and commented on the sensitive way they had been treated.

One centre had a two bedroom flat which was available for parents and families to stay in when they visited their children. The centre also paid for taxis to bring them from the railway station in town and take them back there after their visit.

A parent with sight problems telephoned the secure children's home when he got to the nearest station and they organised a taxi.

One parent commented that the secure children's home had altered the time of a review meeting so that her mother's partner could come with her, which she felt was very accommodating and flexible. As a result, they were able to come regularly, spend a few hours at the establishment and have dinner.

Working with other agencies

28. All the secure establishments visited engaged with other agencies very quickly and effectively once they had admitted a young person. They saw a multi-

disciplinary approach to assessment, planning, service delivery and review as the most appropriate vehicle for change.

29. The young people and their families were central to this partnership. There was general agreement among managers, families and professionals that placement far from home detracted from the effectiveness of such work. As one manager commented:

‘Where a young person’s family lives 40 to 50 miles from the centre there are difficulties ...especially as work ... about relationships is often a feature of [what is] needed to help a young person. Work with schools at this distance is also limited, but we have recruited a full-time resettlement worker who monitors a young person’s progress for six months after they have left.’

30. The secure establishments were committed to ensuring that care planning for individuals clearly addressed the young people’s key concerns, so that they could be successfully reintegrated into the community. Where possible, firm discharge plans were agreed and put in place at the initial planning meeting or as soon as possible afterwards. Care plans generally reflected appropriate training and preparation for the next placement or discharge home. The plans relied on a clear discharge or resettlement plan with the future placement identified for young people in sufficient time to prepare them for the transition. However, managers and staff in each of the secure establishments said that in practice this was not always achieved.

31. Managers and staff from the secure establishments, together with associated social workers and workers from youth offending teams, described the difficulties in making reliable plans for young people on remand or placed on welfare orders. They noted a potential tension between two sets of factors. On the one hand, there were the civil and legal rights of young people to be released when they no longer met the criteria for being placed in secure accommodation. On the other hand were the concerns of those who worked with them that some young people might not yet be ready to return to the community or that the arrangements for their release were not yet adequate. Young people on remand or welfare orders might also have their placement extended by the courts without reference to the transition plan. This made planning for their discharge difficult to manage. One manager said:

‘Local authorities tend to shift the focus of review meetings towards the end of a young person’s order, or they call a short notice meeting. But the focus is very much about where the young person is going to live when they leave [the secure children’s home] or whether it is possible for them to have an overnight stay where they are going to live before they leave. This isn’t enough. You can live on chips and beans but human contact and not being isolated are key to a successful move. Emotional support for a young person is very important in preparation for leaving and when they have left the home.’

32. One director had called on outside agencies such as Voice or the Howard League for Penal Reform to remind local authorities of their obligations to ensure that young people are accommodated and supported appropriately once they have been discharged.^{10,11} Each secure establishment had developed advocacy services and protocols to challenge local authorities that did not fulfil their obligations to young people. The procedures adopted and the rigour with which they were applied differed between establishments.
33. Almost all the social workers, youth offending teams and families who took part in the survey regarded the staff in the secure establishments as helpful and supportive of the young people in their care. The following views are typical of those expressed by parents involved in the survey.

The mother of one young man told inspectors that she came to all the reviews and felt that the unit had gone 'above and beyond' what was expected of them. Her son was receiving help with his mental health needs and had been referred to the child and adolescent mental health service. As part of his training, he had taken a cookery course. The mother thought that the case manager was 'an absolute diamond' and was pleased with the support provided by the key workers. She said that her son had 'come out of himself so much; they have helped him to do so much. I can't fault it'.

Another mother commented that the family had received more help from the home than they had ever had before; her daughter had really changed and was polite and no longer aggressive. She was happy that resettlement plans were about to be sorted out in good time before release.

34. Young people in each of the secure establishments visited were also very positive about the staff working with them and the good support that they were given.

One young person commented on how good it was that he and his peers had 'lots of one-to-one time' with staff. 'People listen and help you.'

Another said that his key worker had been 'amazing and talked to [him] about everything'.

Two young people made very positive comments on the work of the establishment, saying: 'It's the nicest place I've been so far' and 'I love it here.'

¹⁰ Voice is an advocacy organisation for children living away from home or in need. For further information, see: www.voiceyp.org/.

¹¹ For further information, see: www.howardleague.org.uk/.

35. All the secure establishments involved young people routinely in planning meetings and considered them to be part of the planning process. This had positive results, typified by one young person's comment:

'I have been at the home for three months now. It's time for me to take a few steps forward. I want to achieve all I can here and the best I can. I know the staff are here to help me so I should just let them and cooperate with them. I want to change, so now it's the chance to change before it's too late. I need help with anger and frustration and I'm now ready to accept help. When I first came here I couldn't talk to anyone about my problems. But now I can. I'm now willing to climb the mountain and never stop climbing.'

36. Young people and professionals commented on how the systems in some establishments made telephone contact difficult, particularly out of office hours. In at least two of the establishments visited, professionals found that the security systems could lead to social workers being unnecessarily delayed in attending meetings, despite the fact that they had arrived well on time. These situations were in danger of undermining the positive relationships that the establishments were seeking to develop on behalf of the young people and their families.

Preparation for successful transition on discharge or transfer

37. In the establishments visited, the work undertaken to prepare young people for a successful transition was well managed. Careful account was taken of individuals' needs, as the following example illustrates.

A worker from a youth offending team said that discharge planning at the centre with which he was working was 'excellent'. As well as receiving a 'brilliant' education, young people could be confident that their health needs were taken carefully into account and that they received emotional support 'in abundance'. The centre also helped them to make a successful transition into further education and training. One young person that the worker was responsible for had a college placement arranged by the centre and she was supported to integrate into her new placement.

38. All the young people spoken to during the survey confirmed that the staff at the secure establishments provided them with help to prepare for the next stage of their lives. This included building up their self-esteem. One young person explained:

'When you are on "graduate level" on the reward scheme, staff expect a lot of you. They respect you and it is nice to know this.'

39. The support that the young people received in managing their feelings helped them to relate well to each other and to establish positive and professional relationships with the adults in the centres. One young person, for example,

referred to how 'marvellous' the staff were and how 'they are here for you when you need them'. Another said: 'I think everyone is treated fairly and I am pleased with the standards of everyone being treated equally.'

40. The young people surveyed also received good practical support to develop skills and gain qualifications:

A young woman described how she was allowed to return to the secure establishment to take examinations and how she was being helped to finish some early. She mentioned specific staff whom she trusted and to whom she could talk. She was also receiving support from the Connexions service and other professional services. She was confident that all these people would take action to help her if she needed it.

41. All the parents surveyed felt that they had been involved appropriately in drawing up the plans for their children. They had been invited to reviews, kept informed of what was going on and were very happy that the young people's needs were being met. The following comments are typical of parents' views.

The mother of one young man told inspectors that the education her son received was 'fantastic' and that he had 'come on in leaps and bounds'. She felt that staff had kept her informed about her son's progress, discussed any problems with her and been successful in finding solutions. As well as being pleased with her son's academic progress, she was also complimentary about the work being done to help him deal with his offending behaviour. She felt that reviews were well organised and informative.

42. Young people, their families and the professionals working with them recognised the valuable contribution that vocational training could make: in raising self-esteem, developing better social communication and providing the skills to improve the chances of successful reintegration into the community.

43. All the establishments involved in the survey offered work experience and vocational opportunities but, in most cases, there was considerable scope to improve and develop such provision, as the following examples show.¹²

Young people at one establishment had plenty of opportunities to undertake training in life skills. They were encouraged to prepare meals, tidy up and do their laundry and suitable facilities were made available for this. However, the opportunities for more developed vocational training were much more limited.

¹² This reflects the findings of inspection reports on individual establishments, as well as a recent survey report: *Transition through detention and custody* (090115), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090115.

In another centre, young people acknowledged that they received some help with practical skills such as cooking and computing. However, they had no opportunity to learn any DIY skills that they felt might be useful.

44. The managers and staff at the secure establishments and the social workers and workers from youth offending teams involved, generally all identified the levels of risk involved in preparing young people for 'mobility' and the difficulty in obtaining appropriate community placements.¹³ However, they saw that where appropriate it could be an important contributor to a successful return to the community, as illustrated here.

Wherever possible, this establishment used 'mobility' to help young people reintegrate into the community. It funded staff to conduct reviews and provide support within the community to develop such placements. The focus was primarily on local young people, although the manager was also happy for staff to support young people from elsewhere in the country by telephone, as part of monitored contact. However, the extent to which this was possible was limited by the resources available. Plans had been prepared for the possible introduction of a transitions unit to offer outreach and continuing support to young people once they had been discharged, but these had not yet been approved.

45. Managers and resettlement workers felt that mobility and vocational placements in the community were most effective when young people were placed within their home region or in the area planned. This allowed staff from the secure establishments to work more closely with families and with educational and residential settings on planning and managing transition carefully. They were able to support the families and other agencies to implement the transition plans that had been agreed and to support the young person during the critical early period following their return to the community. The establishments were prepared to offer some transitional support to young people placed from outside their region, but such arrangements presented far greater logistical problems.
46. Managers felt that successful reintegration also depended to a large degree on the length and type of the order under which the young person was being confined. If it was too short or indeterminate because of remand or welfare considerations, it made resettlement planning more difficult.
47. In many of the secure establishments, the opportunity to engage in work experience or vocational training was seen as an incentive and reward for good

¹³ 'Mobility' or 'Release on Temporary Licence' from a secure establishment is the procedure whereby young people are approved as part of their individual case or sentence planning, following careful risk assessment, to spend time in the community while placed in the secure establishment, for prescribed activities and under supervision by staff. It is often for visits to new accommodation, or new school placements, or may in some cases be to engage in a recreational or vocational activity.

behaviour. While there were clear and obvious reasons for this, young people pointed out that it could result in some not having such opportunities until they had been released. The managers and social workers with whom discussions were held during the survey agreed that it was essential that there was a multi-disciplinary approach to drawing up and reviewing discharge plans and transition arrangements. This process was usually managed through the reviews held at the secure establishments.

48. These meetings were seen as important events and generally well managed but there was clearly scope to improve them further.

A young person and a youth offending team worker were worried that, in a recent review, the decisions appeared to have been made by others beforehand and simply 'rubber stamped' at the meeting. Another young person complained that the questions asked at reviews were always 'closed' and there was no opportunity to offer an opinion.

A previous survey by Ofsted also reported that:

'Parents, carers, social workers and youth offending team representatives, appropriate residential staff and education staff are invited and expected to attend [detention and training order review meetings]. However, youth offending team workers from an individual's home location did not always attend these meetings at the establishments. When they did attend, in too many cases the youth offending team workers had not established an effective working relationship with the child or young person and did not have the knowledge they needed to inform the process.'¹⁴

49. For some of the young people involved in the survey, the local authority had a clear and specific responsibility to offer them support. These included young people 'looked after' under the Children Act 1989, or those entitled to support from local authorities under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. Despite the legal obligation to offer appropriate services to these young people, local authorities did not always do so in an appropriate or timely manner. For example, few of the looked after young people who were entitled to support under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 had active pathway plans.
50. Young people were not always aware of where they were being discharged to and had not always agreed to or been consulted on the placement. A placement might not even have been available until the date of discharge. The following examples highlight the inconsistencies of provision.

A youth offending team manager felt that the secure establishment he was working with made good plans for young people and carried out good

¹⁴ *Transition through detention and custody* (090115), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090115.

preparatory work with them. However, he pointed out that it was difficult to plan when the support and contribution of local authorities was necessary. It was quite common for the local authority to delay identifying or allocating a place in a children's home or foster placement until as close as possible to the discharge date. This meant that young people had limited choice and opportunity to prepare for the transition.

Another manager described the quality of resettlement and discharge planning as a 'postcode' or 'YOT lottery'. There was no consistency of resettlement assessment, planning or service delivery among local authorities, and some local authorities continued to fail to meet their obligations to young people.

51. These findings, together with Ofsted's inspection reports on individual establishments, showed that too many local authorities were failing to meet their obligations towards young people. It is not uncommon for young people to be discharged from a secure placement without having an appropriate education or training placement guaranteed for them. Ofsted's report of a survey on transition noted:

'Relationships between the secure establishment and the young person's home area were not always productive and there were delays by the local authorities in arranging accommodation on the young person's release. Finding accommodation for older children was often problematic. There were frequently too many changes of care placement plans by the different agencies, led by the local authority, in the final weeks before transition and resettlement. This was unsettling and demotivating for the young people involved, who increasingly felt unwanted.'¹⁵

The same survey also reported that finding accommodation was sometimes left until the day of the young person's release, with a detrimental impact on training and education. Without a home address it was very difficult for a young person or the education practitioner to make any plans.

Post-discharge support

52. Planned support from staff at the secure establishments usually finished at the point when the young person was discharged. At least half of the establishments offered informal support up to the first community review. Apart from this, opportunities were limited to build on the positive, trusting relationships that had been established between staff and young people. There was limited evidence to suggest that, once the young person had left, staff

¹⁵ *Transition through detention and custody* (090115), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090115

from the establishments had opportunities to contribute to multi-disciplinary planning or service delivery.

A manager felt that the unit plan for young people supported them very well up to the point at which they were discharged.¹⁶ Although case managers attended the first post-discharge review, the unit was not seen as having any further role to play in supporting the young people after this meeting. Responsibility for implementing the post-discharge plan rested with a young person's youth offending team for the duration of the young person's sentence. However, the plan could be changed or replaced without the staff in the unit being consulted.

53. Almost half of the secure establishments visited said that they would be able to offer further support if this were funded by the responsible authority. However, such funding was rarely made available. At least half of them offered informal support to young people but this was not part of a discharge plan, not funded and only available to young people living locally. Those living outside the regions were unlikely to receive support from the secure establishment after they were discharged.
54. Local social workers and youth offending teams were strongly of the opinion that the young people and their families would welcome further contact with the establishments. Parents, and young people who had recently been discharged, confirmed this and were very positive about the level of informal support that they were receiving.

A mother whose son had been discharged said that she felt able to keep in touch with the centre. She felt that she could telephone if she had any concerns. There was no formal contact, however, now that her son had been discharged.

In another example, a mother was grateful for the support that the centre offered and felt that the staff had a really good relationship with her son. She would have been happy for planned and continuing contact, and felt that she would be able to telephone if she had any concerns and wanted advice. However, there had not been any formal contact since her son was released.

Seven parents whose children had been discharged confirmed that there was no planned post-discharge support from the secure placements. However, they considered that there had been some informal support and they felt able to contact the centres if they needed advice. All would have welcomed post-discharge support and continuing contact with the secure

¹⁶ Most young people sentenced to Detention and Training Orders are not 'looked after' by a local authority and do not have allocated social workers.

establishment. Similarly, six parents whose children were still placed in two secure placements felt that contact from staff would be helpful.

55. Young people sentenced to custody as part of a Detention and Training Order (the main custodial sentence for under-18s) should receive statutory supervision after their release. However, for many of the professionals, families and young people who responded to the survey, this level of support was often not adequate to meet their needs. Two managers of secure establishments and five of the resettlement workers suggested that discharge plans made during placements were not always met in full once the young person was discharged. Although case managers attended the first post-discharge review, the unit had no further role after that meeting. Therefore, the post-discharge plan for a young person might be changed without any reference to the staff who had devised it. This was confirmed by three young people.

The discharge plans drawn up at the secure centre included arrangements to find accommodation, education and training for each of them. Two had been discharged home as planned but neither had been allocated an educational placement and they were still waiting for arrangements to be made. The third was living in unsuitable accommodation which she had had to find for herself. All three had felt well supported at the centre, but no formal aftercare or post-discharge arrangements were made for them when they were discharged.

56. Several of the young people in the survey had assumed that they would receive further support after they had been discharged but none had been forthcoming. One of them described how this had led to the breakdown of her placement.

The young woman had not been offered any support once she left the secure unit and none had been planned. She had had only one week to complete the transition to an 'open' care home. This had not been long enough for her to get to know the placement and, as a result, she had moved back to the secure unit. She felt very strongly that she had needed to maintain contact with the secure unit after she had left and to receive continuing support, including visits from staff, for the first two or three months to check on how she was managing.

Notes

Between July 2009 and January 2010, inspectors visited 16 secure children's homes and four secure training centres in England. During the visits, they examined individual case files, policies, procedures and other documentation. They interviewed 99 young people, either individually or as part of a focus group. In addition, 109 parents, social workers and youth offending team workers were contacted and interviewed by telephone. Further evidence was gathered through written questions (see Annex C). Inspectors also met the placement team of the Youth Justice Board.

Respondents	Completed questions	Interviewed
Registered managers	10	20
Resettlement staff	31	43
Young people	76	99
Family members	5	44
Youth offending team/social workers	14	65

Findings from Ofsted's 2009–10 inspections of all secure children's homes and secure training centres were also reviewed for this report.

Further information

Publications by Ofsted

Support for care leavers (080259), Ofsted, 2009;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080259.

Life in secure care (080241), Ofsted, 2009;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080241.

Transition through detention and custody (090115), Ofsted, 2010;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090115.

An evaluation of the provision of mental health services for looked after young people over the age of 16 accommodated in residential settings (080260), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080260.

Other publications

The Children Act 1989: Guidance and Regulations (Volume 4 Residential Care), HMSO, 1991.

Tell them so they listen: Messages from Young People in Custody, HORS 201, Home Office, 2000; <http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/hors2000.html>.

Children's homes: national minimum standards, children's homes regulations; TSO, 2002;
www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4010076.

Youth crime action plan, Ministry of Justice, 2008;
www.justice.gov.uk/publications/youth-crime-action-plan.htm.

Sentencing statistics, England and Wales, Ministry of Justice, 2009;
www.justice.gov.uk/publications/sentencingquarterly.htm.

National standards for youth justice services, Youth Justice Board, 2009;
www.yjb.gov.uk/en-gb/practitioners/MonitoringPerformance/NationalStandards/.

Annex A: Providers visited for this survey

Secure children's homes

Aldine House Secure Children's Centre

Atkinson Unit

Aycliffe Secure Services

Barton Moss Secure Care Centre

Beechfield Secure Unit

Clare Lodge Secure Children's Home

Clayfields House Secure Unit

East Moor Secure Children's Home

Kyloe House

Lansdowne Secure Unit

Leverton Hall Secure Unit

Lincolnshire Secure Unit

Red Bank Community Home

St Catherine's Secure Centre

Swanwick Lodge

Vinney Green Secure Unit.

Secure training centres

Hassockfield Secure Training Centre

Medway Secure Training Centre

Oakhill Secure Training Centre

Rainsbrook Secure Training Centre

Annex B: Juvenile reoffending rates

Juvenile actual reoffending rates and frequency per 100 offenders by age groups, for those released from custody

Age bands	Cohort year Q1	Number of offenders	Actual reoffending rate	Number of offences per 100 offenders
10–15	2000	127	79.5%	534.6
	2002	228	75.9%	514.5
	2003	133	78.2%	424.8
	2004	209	80.4%	461.2
	2005	195	80.0%	463.1
	2006	200	83.0%	463.5
	2007	171	78.9%	407.0
	2008	188	82.4%	435.6
16	2000	257	73.9%	510.5
	2002	275	71.3%	454.9
	2003	235	76.6%	465.1
	2004	244	77.0%	401.6
	2005	275	70.2%	424.7
	2006	262	79.4%	433.2
	2007	246	77.2%	370.7
	2008	237	74.7%	305.9
17	2000	528	75.6%	455.7
	2002	456	72.4%	448.2
	2003	418	70.8%	435.4
	2004	362	73.8%	397.0
	2005	374	71.7%	370.3
	2006	355	71.8%	349.0
	2007	361	72.3%	328.3
	2008	391	70.1%	319.9
Total	2000	912	75.7%	482.1
	2002	959	72.9%	465.9
	2003	786	73.8%	442.5
	2004	815	76.4%	414.8
	2005	844	73.1%	409.5
	2006	817	77.0%	404.0
	2007	778	75.3%	359.0
	2008	816	74.3%	342.5

Juvenile reoffending covers those aged 10 to 17. A release from custody could be from a secure training centre, a secure children's home or a young offender institution. Data are not broken down by type of release establishment or by individual release establishment.

The table shows the frequency of reoffences per 100 offenders and the actual rate of reoffending since 2000. Those aged 10 to 15 have been banded due to the small number of offenders in each of the groups. This table is a further breakdown of Table A5 from the publication:

www.justice.gov.uk/publications/reoffendingjuveniles.htm.

Annex C: Survey questions

Questions were designed for the following key groups in the survey:

- registered managers of the secure children's homes and directors of secure training centres
- specialist resettlement workers or staff with responsibility for managing admission and discharge arrangements for children and young people within secure establishments
- social workers and youth offending team workers placing children and young people in secure establishments
- parents of children and young people placed in secure establishments
- children and young people placed in secure establishments.

The respondents were asked the following questions.

- How effectively does the decision-making process to admit a young person to a secure establishment take into account recognised key factors for successful placement? For example, distance from home; capacity for close multi-agency working; contact with significant others; continuity of care and accommodation; and education, employment, and training opportunities upon discharge.
- How well does the decision process to admit a young person to a secure placement consult and take into account the views of significant others, for example, parents and carers, social workers, youth offending team workers and guardians, in deciding the most appropriate placement?
- How effectively does individual care planning within secure establishments identify and address key factors for successful reintegration back into the community? For example, how well are close multi-agency working, contact with significant others, continuity of care, and timely provision of appropriate accommodation, education/employment/training for young people upon discharge, managed?
- How well do secure establishments address the individual needs and rights of young people to ensure that they are suitably equipped to cope upon discharge? For example: training in life skills; preparation to cope independently in the community; vocational education and training; and community participation through the use of release on temporary licence/mobility.
- How successfully do secure establishments implement post-discharge and resettlement plans with young people after they have been discharged? Is the impact of this work affected by the length of time that the establishment is able to retain contact?