



**Health  
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An tÚdarás Um Fhaisnéis  
agus Cáilíocht Sláinte

# Report of Oberstown Children Detention Campus

Name of provider:	Oberstown Children Detention Campus
Type of inspection:	Announced
Date of inspection:	08 – 10 December 2020
Centre ID:	OSV - 0004225
Fieldwork ID	MON-0031194

### **Profile**

Oberstown children Detention Campus provides safe and secure care and education to children between 10 and 18 years who have been committed to custody after conviction for criminal offences or remanded to custody while awaiting trial or sentence. Their aim is to support children to improve decision making capacity, move away from offending behaviour and prepare them to return to their community following their release from detention.

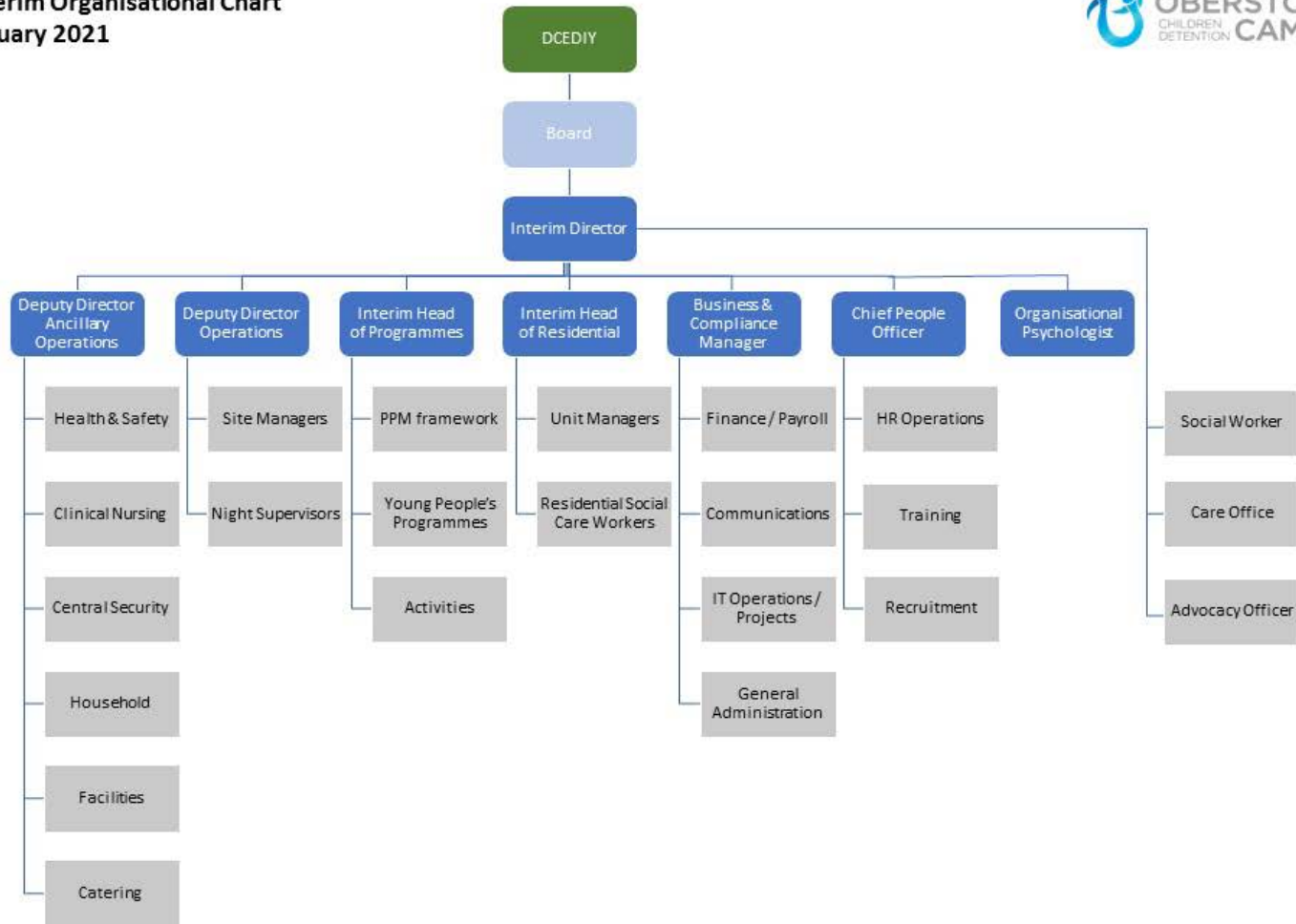
### **Accommodation**

The Oberstown Children Detention Campus is located in a rural setting in north Dublin. It comprises nine residential units for children, and school building, outdoor and indoor recreational facilities, and a reception/administration block which contains medical and dental facilities and facilities for children to meet their visitors and other professionals involved in their care. The design and layout provided adequate private and communal facilities for the children both in terms of indoor and outdoor space. The campus had external security fencing.

### **Management**

Oberstown Children Detention Campus is managed by the Board of Management who were appointed by, and report to, the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The Board of Management has direct governance of the Oberstown Children Detention Campus in accordance with policy guidelines laid down by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs through the Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS) in accordance with the Children Act, 2001, as amended. The Director was responsible for the day-to-day operation of campus as well as acting in Loco Parentis to each child in custody. Each unit within the campus was managed by a unit manager. The organisational chart in Figure 1 describes the current management and team structure and is based on information provided by the Oberstown Children Detention Campus following the inspection.

**Interim Organisational Chart  
January 2021**



## How we inspect

To prepare for this inspection the inspector or inspectors reviewed all information about this service. This included any previous inspection findings and information received since the last inspection.

As part of our inspection, where possible, we:

- speak with children to find out their experience of the service
- talk to staff and management to find out how they plan, deliver and monitor the care and support services that are provided to children who live in Oberstown
- observe practice and daily life to see if it reflects what people tell us
- review documents to see if appropriate records are kept and that they reflect practice and what people tell us.

In order to summarize our inspection findings and to describe how well a service is doing, we group and report on the standards under two dimensions:

### **1. Capacity and capability of the service:**

This section describes the leadership and management of the service and how effective it is in ensuring that a good quality and safe service is being provided. It outlines how people who work in the service are trained and whether there are appropriate systems and processes in place to underpin the safe delivery and oversight of the service.

### **2. Quality and safety of the service:**

This section describes the care and support children receive and if it was of a good quality and ensured people were safe. It includes information about the care and supports available for people and the environment in which they live.

A full list of all standards and the dimension they are reported under can be seen in Appendix 1.

**This inspection was carried out during the following times:**

Date	Times of inspection	Inspector	Role
08/12/2020	10:00hrs to 16:00hrs	Jane McCarroll Sabine Buschmann	Inspector Inspector
	12:30hrs to 16:00hrs	Bronagh Gibson	Regional manager
09/12/2020	09:30hrs to 16:00hrs	Jane McCarroll Sabine Buschmann	Inspector Inspector
	12:30hrs to 16:00hrs	Bronagh Gibson	Regional Manager
10/12/2020	08:00hrs to 16:00hrs	Jane McCarroll	Inspector
	09:00hrs to 17:00hrs	Sabine Buschmann	Inspector

Number of children on the date of inspection:	37
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## What children told us and what inspectors observed

Over the course of the inspection, inspectors met and talked with 11 children about their understanding of their rights whilst placed in the service, and asked them their views on how they felt their rights were being promoted. Inspectors also asked children about their understanding of and involvement in planning their care and decisions made about them, including their participation in various decision-making processes. This section of the report presents these children's views, alongside inspectors observations while onsite.

The Campus is secure, meaning that children cannot leave the premises or their individual living units without permission and staff assistance, and cannot access the Campus grounds without staff supervision. Over the two days that inspectors were onsite, they observed children walking around the Campus, and going to and from school, in the company of staff and other children. Children and staff members were observed chatting and enjoying each others company on these walks, and the children were observed as at ease. Inspectors also observed staff managing complex situations in a responsive and respectful way, and generally, interactions with children were observed as caring, warm and supportive.

Overall, children who met with inspectors described positive experiences of their care. They spoke well of staff members and said that they were helpful, supportive and nice. Some comments by children included:

"When I came her for the first time, staff explained everthing to me".

"I like the staff, they are "easy going" and the rules are fair".

Inspectors met with children placed on committal and on remand to the service, and they varied somewhat in their views in relation to their rights. The majority showed a good level of understanding of their rights while placed in detention, and were well able to talk about their experience in this regard. They said that the staff team, and in particular their two keyworkers (named staff assigned to them), explained these rights to them, and provided them with written information which they could keep. One child said, "Keyworkers care about you more but all the staff are supportive and help you with stuff".

The children described some common experiences in relation to exercising their rights. They said for example that they had an advocacy officer on campus that visited the units regulary and assisted them when they wished to make a complaint. They gave examples of complaints they had made, including for example, their unhappiness about some of the food. They said that their complaints were heard and addressed.

Children placed on remand however, had different experiences. For example, these children felt that they did not receive enough information about their rights, and that most of their understanding of these were from what their peers told them. These children said that they were not aware of how the complaints process worked, but importantly, they were confident to raise any concern they had with a member of staff. They said that they would like information booklets on their rights to help them understand better. Inspectors were satisfied, that processes were in place to inform children of their rights and to provide them with written information.

There were times when children were separated from their peers in complex situations. The children who met with inspectors said they understood why they were separated and felt this was fair, however, they said that there were times when they were bored when on separation.

Children were very positive about their involvement in planning for their care. They said that they felt involved in this process and in decisions that were made about them. One child told inspectors that they looked forward to their placement planning meeting, because it gave them a focus, some goals and a timeframe to achieve these goals.

When asked what could improve in the service, children said the following:

"Not enough activities on the weekend"

"Food could be better some of the time, we had under-cooked pasta and that was not nice"

"Not having visitors is really hard. Zoom calls are not enough and can be annoying" and

"They [staff] could teach us how to get ready for society again when we leave here".

## Capacity and capability

This inspection focused on three standards, two of which were directly related to planning for children placed in the service, and the promotion of their rights, and staff supervision. Overall, there were improvements on the previous year in relation to staff supervision, and while this was a welcome finding, more was required to ensure this process was as effective and beneficial as it could be.

Supervision is a process through which staff and managers are held to account for their day-to-day practice, and any supports required by individuals to improve the quality of their practice is identified. Supervision also presents an opportunity for sharing information on the service, such as new policies and procedures, and for acknowledging good practice.

The provision of supervision in Oberstown Children Detention Campus was guided by a policy and accompanying procedure. Records showed that each staff member and their supervisor signed an agreed contract which set out the terms of supervision, including their individual roles and responsibilities within this process. Inspectors found that this approach provided transparency across the service on the overall function of supervision and the expectations of the service of this process, with regard to promoting reflective practice and enhancing individual performance.

Inspectors reviewed a broad sample of supervision records for staff and managers across the service and found that while supervision was taking place, the frequency at which it occurred, and the quality of supervision records varied. The majority of records reviewed included a schedule of supervision meetings, and it was clear from most that there was a good rationale for meetings not taking place, such as annual or sick leave. While some staff had regular supervision which was provided as close as possible to the timeframes required, there were significant time lapses between meetings for others. Varied recording in supervision schedules, meant that the rationale for these time lapses were not always accounted for.

Staff members who met with inspectors were satisfied with supervision, but some highlighted delays in the provision of supervision when they had a change of manager. Unit managers were confident in their ability to supervise their staff, and they were clear about how this process was utilised for accountability, but also for motivation and support to staff.

Supervision meeting minutes were recorded on a standardised template and it was obvious that effort had gone in to its development, so as to ensure areas of discussion, actions required, and the timeframes within which they should be implemented, were clearly and consistently recorded. The sample of meeting records reviewed by



inspectors, showed that although meetings were recorded using the template, it was not always completed in full, or utilised effectively. Where records were good enough, they detailed what was discussed at the meeting, and decision making was more transparent. This made it easier for both parties to review previous decisions and actions at subsequent meetings, to map progress. However, many of the records reviewed did not record specific actions or timeframes for their completion, and areas of discussion were typically recorded in a single word or phrase, such as 'Team', 'Keyworking', 'Boys meetings', with no detail or context provided for the discussion.

Positively, there was evidence to show that individual performance or issues related to team dynamics were addressed within the supervision process, when this was appropriate, and this provided assurance to senior managers. Furthermore, where group supervision was utilised by managers, this was an effective way to promote group cohesion and joint decision making across teams.

Records provided to inspectors demonstrated a clear connection between recommendations from probationary reports and supervision, but there were time lapses between supervision sessions for some staff which meant updates on progress were not frequent enough.

Overall, it was a positive finding that supervision was taking place across the service and all grades, and although records were not always detailed, it was evident what was discussed at each session. Improved recording in relation to discussions, decisions, actions and timeframes for completion, and the rationale for time lapses between supervision meetings, would increase the effectiveness of the supervision process in ensuring accountability for practice, and in turn, the level of assurance this provides to managers.

#### **Standard 6: Staffing and management**

Staff in the school shall be organised and managed in a manner designed to deliver the best possible care and protection for young people in an effective manner.

While supervision meetings took place for all staff, these meetings were not always held at the frequency required and schedules of meetings did not always provide a rationale for time lapses between meetings.

Although supervision records were kept in relation to each meeting, they varied, and did not always record an adequate level of detail of discussions, actions required and timeframes for completion.

It is for these reasons that the service was found to be substantially compliant with this standard.

Judgement: Substantially compliant

## Quality and safety

Care of children placed in the service was well planned and this meant that children's needs were being met on an assessed basis, through a multi-agency and –disciplinary approach. Each child had a placement plan that was developed at placement plan meetings which included therapeutic, medical, social work, educational and social care staff input.

Children were actively encouraged to participate in decision making about their lives by staff and managers. It was evident from talking with staff and children that children had a say in important decisions, such as their placement plans, and were encouraged to attend meetings where planning happened.

Planning for children began at the time of their admission to the service. Initial assessment interviews were completed with children on their arrival, and a placement planning meeting was convened within the next 72 hours. A review of meeting records showed that children, their parents and key professionals were supported to participate and contribute to these meetings, and this impacted on positive decision-making.

There were clear procedures in place regarding timeframes for placement planning meetings and reviews, who should be invited to attend, and how the meetings should be recorded. However, inspectors found that record keeping related to planning for children was not always good and as a result, did not consistently reflect the good quality work being carried out by staff with children, their families and other professionals. There were a number of documents which recorded information related to assessments of children's needs and planning of their care. Some were not completed, while others were comprehensive.

Children's rights were well promoted and the systems and supports in place for ensuring this was the case were working well, and supported children to exercise these rights. The systems in place also ensured day-to-day practice was being monitored and as a result, drove quality improvements in practice.

The campus was a secure environment, and there were systems and practices in place to ensure their rights were promoted and respected within this context. Records showed that keyworkers provided each young person with an information pack about their rights and responsibilities when they arrived at the centre. Information about young people's rights was prominently displayed on noticeboards throughout the service.

There were several systems in place to ensure the children's voices were heard and that their concerns or complaints were valued. There was a campus council where

children were represented, and a board of management young people's committee was established, to facilitate children to raise their concerns with members of the board.

The service actively encouraged and facilitated external professionals and advocates for children to come to the service and visit with children. Records showed that members of advocacy services visited children placed in the service, and assisted them with any concerns or complaints they had. In addition, there was an advocacy officer for the campus, who explained to inspectors that they offered advice and support to the young people in the centre, to enable them to express their wishes and to ensure that their voice was heard. From a review of case records, inspectors found that the advocacy officer supported children to make complaints, and was well informed of all complaints as well as critical incidents involving children in the service, so adequate supports could be provided when needed.

There was an effective system in place to manage complaints. There was good oversight of all complaints. Complaints were recorded, managed, reviewed and investigated and had been addressed in a timely manner. Inspectors reviewed 10 complaints records which showed that the outcome of the complaint (as in founded or unfounded) was clearly recorded, as well as a record that indicated if the young person was satisfied or not with the outcome. There was evidence that children's complaints were taken seriously and addressed promptly. It was also evident that audits were completed when patterns emerged.

Children were seen to have access to the outdoors, and where possible, this included leaving the campus for various activities. It was evident from the sample of records reviewed, interviews with children and observations of inspectors, that children had access to fresh air and ample supplies of food.

#### **Standard 4: Children's rights**

Young people receive care in a manner which safeguards their rights and actively promotes their welfare. The practices of the centre should promote the additional rights afforded to young people living away from home.

There were systems and procedures in place to promote children's rights and have their voice heard. Children had access to the outdoors as appropriate, and to good supplies of food.

It is for these reasons that the service was found to be compliant with this standard.

Judgment: Compliant

**Standard 5: Planning for Young People**

The school has a written care plan for each young person entering its care. The plan is developed in consultation with parents/guardians and the young person concerned and is subject to regular review. The plan stresses the need for regular contact with family and prepares the young person for leaving care. The plan promotes the general welfare of the young person including appropriate provision to meet his/her educational, health, emotional and psychological needs. The experience of young people is enhanced by positive working relationships between professionals.

Planning for young people was good, but records did not always reflect this process and the good quality of the direct work with children involved.

It is for these reasons that the service was found to be substantially compliant with this standard.

Judgment: Substantially compliant

## Appendix 1 - Full list of standards considered under each dimension

Standard Title	Judgment
<b>Capacity and capability</b>	
<b>Standard 6: Management and Staffing</b>	Substantially compliant
<b>Quality and Safety</b>	
<b>Standard 4: Children's Rights</b>	Compliant
<b>Standard 5: Planning for young people</b>	Substantially compliant