

Executive Summary

This is a joint report of quarterly statutory inspections of both the Brisbane and Cleveland Youth Detention Centres (BYDC and CYDC). The on-site inspections occurred from 27 to 31 May (BYDC) and 10 to 14 June (CYDC) 2019. Statutory detention centre inspections are conducted by delegated Inspectors, located within the office of the Director-General, Department of Youth Justice. This is a joint report covering both inspections provided to the Director-General, which aims to contribute to improving youth detention centre operations across both centres.

The focus areas under inspection in this quarter were programs and purposeful activity, reintegration, suicide risk and self-harm, separations and behavioural plans. In gathering evidence, Inspectors visited all units over the inspection week and spoke to staff and young people in each unit. Emerging issues and themes were corroborated through consultation with relevant managers and inspection of available data. The key observations, findings and recommendations in relation to the focus areas are summarised below.

Focus Area 1 – Programs and Purposeful Activity

The Inspectorate found that both centres offer a range of programs to young people promoting their connection to culture, improving their physical and mental health, increasing life skills and addressing their offending behaviour. Programs are delivered on-site by multiple teams within the Department of Youth Justice, the Department of Education and Queensland Health. The Inspectorate has recommended focussed inter-departmental discussions at each centre to assist in overcoming barriers to program delivery such as the limited availability of staff and other shared resources.

Focus Area 2 – Reintegration

The Inspectorate found that reintegration planning is currently occurring after sentencing as part of the ongoing case management of young people in detention, with varying levels of detail and collaboration with community-based stakeholders. The Inspectorate has recommended that a targeted multi-agency reintegration plan is developed for every eligible young person, across all areas of the young person's life including offending, education and employment, substance abuse, family circumstances, parenting, leisure and recreation, personality or behaviour, peer relations and attitude.

Very low numbers of reintegration leaves of absence are currently occurring at both BYDC and CYDC, due to operational staff being prioritised to accommodation sections and the outcome of individual risk assessments. The Inspectorate has recommended that off-site leaves of absence be considered as part of the broader reintegration planning process using a common risk assessment tool. Reintegration leaves of absence should, if approved, sit alongside a range of centre-based activities that increase the young person's independence and their connection to their support network in the community. The Inspectorate further recommended the allocation of dedicated staff for off-centre reintegration activities.

The Inspectorate also found that high percentages of young people on remand (BYDC 83% and CYDC 70% at the time of inspection in May/June 2019) are resulting in many young people being ineligible for formal reintegration planning and off-centre reintegration activities. The Inspectorate has recommended the extension of eligibility for reintegration planning to suitable young people on long-term remand as well as those who have been sentenced.

The Inspectorate found that there are times when trusted relationships between staff and young people are developed in youth detention that would provide benefit for both young people and staff if continued after the young person is reintegrated into their community. The Inspectorate has recommended that detention centres develop a process for a detention centre staff member to apply for approval to make positive contact with a young person following release from youth detention, such as attending the young person's sporting event or place of employment.

The Inspectorate described the cultural units at each centre and the range of ways in which these units facilitate positive connections to culture for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people while they are in detention, such as supported family visits and connection to Elders. No recommendations have been made in relation to the work of cultural units at BYDC or CYDC.

The Inspectorate noted the work done for all young people in detention preparing them to transition back to their communities through the case management framework, such as supporting young people to engage in programs and education according to their individual goals and needs. BYDC's Visits Beyond Visits program is highlighted, which provides an avenue for caseworkers and youth workers from Youth Justice Service Centres to visit young people in their units and maintain or develop a relationship with the young person during their time in detention.

The Inspectorate described the work of the Department of Education's Transition Team at BYDC in building relationships with employers in the community, arranging interviews and job opportunities for young people prior to release. With the increased average age of young people in youth detention following the inclusion of 17-year-olds in the youth justice system, the Inspectorate has recommended that CYDC increase the focus on building employment resources, networking with employers and linking young people to jobs before release.

Focus Area 3 – Suicide Risk and Self Harm

The Inspectorate noted that suicide observation compliance monitoring and suicide risk assessments were occurring as per legislative, policy and practice guidelines. A review of data showed that incidents of self-harm in both centres were stable, with the majority attributable to a very small number of young people who present more complex needs. No recommendations have been made in this area.

Focus Area 4 – Separations

The Inspectorate noted previous recommendations made in recent inspection reports relating to continuous cell occupancy separations which are being progressed by Youth Justice Services. The June 2018 recommendation relates to the provision of disaggregated separations data to the Inspectorate; and the March 2019 recommendation relates to increased access to outdoor physical activity during periods of continuous cell occupancy. The Inspectorate has made no further recommendations at this time.

Focus Area 5 – Behaviour Support Plans

The Inspectorate reviewed behaviour support plans and attended multi-disciplinary team meetings at each centre, led by the Behavioural Support Team, in which key stakeholders developed a tailored strategy to support selected young people to maintain positive behaviour. A cultural perspective was included in discussions and documented plans. No recommendations are made by the Inspectorate in this focus area.

List of Recommendations

Focus Area 1 – Programs and Purposeful Activity

Recommendation 1

The Inspectorate recommends that Youth Justice Services develops Terms of Reference and commences discussions with all agencies operating within the youth detention centres, to improve the coordination of programs and services in youth detention.

Focus Area 2 – Reintegration

Recommendation 2

The Inspectorate recommends that Youth Justice Services revises policies and procedures related to reintegration, to increase access to targeted, multi-agency reintegration plans that focus on the range of supports available to young people after release.

Recommendation 3

It is recommended that both centres develop reintegration plans for suitable young people on long-term remand, using a common risk assessment tool to assess the appropriateness of reintegration LOAs and other reintegration activities as part of these plans.

Recommendation 4

It is recommended that any negotiations undertaken in the future to manage the variable demand within detention centres should consider the opportunity for additional staff for reintegration planning and reintegration LOA escorts to be funded across both centres.

Recommendation 5

It is recommended that the detention centres develop a process for staff who are assessed as having a beneficial, supportive relationship with young people to continue to see young people in the community on a case-by-case basis, with management approval and in coordination with the relevant community office.

Recommendation 6

It is recommended that CYDC increases the focus on building employment resources, networking with employers and linking young people to jobs before release.

Focus Area 3 – Suicide Risk and Self Harm

Nil recommendations made.

Focus Area 4 – Separations

Nil recommendations made.

Focus Area 5 – Behaviour Support Plans

Nil recommendations made.