

Youth Detention Facility Under Fire After Disturbing Failures in Care and Oversight

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An inspection at Oakhill Secure Training Centre near Milton Keynes has uncovered serious failings in the care and safety of young people, prompting the facility to be placed under special measures. The inspection by Ofsted, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, revealed troubling lapses in safeguarding, mental health support, and staff conduct, raising concerns about the welfare of the children housed at the centre.

Oakhill Secure Training Centre, run by private security company G4S, holds up to 80 boys aged between 12 and 18. The inspection carried out in July documented “serious and systemic failures” that placed children at risk of harm. Ofsted’s Chief Inspector issued an “urgent notification” requiring a formal response from Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood within 28 days, a move reserved for situations deemed critical.

Among the most alarming findings was the case of a suicidal child who waited 12 days to see a mental health professional. Another child was prescribed two medications known to have dangerous interactions, and medical test results for a child with troubling health symptoms went unprocessed for over three months. In several instances, children with mental health concerns were not seen on time, with one waiting more than a week for basic intervention despite complex diagnoses.

The report also detailed the inappropriate use of restraint techniques. Some staff continued using outdated methods, such as the “inverted wrist hold,” which caused unintentional pain due to a lack of updated training. In total, more than 20 staff members were suspended between November and early July; 16 of those cases involved inappropriate conduct with children. Since mid-July, seven additional suspensions have occurred for similar reasons.

Serious allegations were at times not communicated to the human resources department, allowing some staff to continue working with children despite the nature of the claims against them. The inspection further revealed unsanitary living conditions, improper use of children’s funds under the pretence of a victim support initiative, and unauthorised sharing of sensitive information about both the children and staff.

Staff reportedly described a workplace culture marked by fear, mistrust, and retaliation. This internal dysfunction, coupled with evident lapses in management oversight, paints a troubling picture of the facility’s environment.

Sir Nic Dakin, the Minister for Youth Justice, described the findings as “truly shocking and unacceptable,” and said he had visited the facility to ensure immediate corrective measures were in progress. “We will publish an action plan within the month,” Dakin said, emphasising the government’s commitment to further action if required.

In response, a G4S spokesperson representing Oakhill said: “The safety and welfare of children at Oakhill STC is our highest priority, and we take the Ofsted inspection findings extremely seriously. We are working collaboratively with the Youth Custody Service and HM

Prison and Probation Service to develop a robust action plan to address the concerns raised.”

This is not the first time Oakhill has faced scrutiny. Previous warnings, including one in 2021, raised similar concerns, prompting questions about long-term oversight of private contractors in the youth justice system. The current revelations are likely to intensify calls for reform, and potentially trigger a reassessment of the role private providers play in the custodial care of vulnerable young individuals.