

Media release

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PRAISE FOR IMPROVEMENTS AT ASHLEY YOUTH DETENTION CENTRE

The Custodial Inspector has praised improvements at the Ashley Youth Detention Centre (AYDC) in the most recent [Youth Wellbeing Inspection Report](#), in particular engagement with Aboriginal culture and the provision of sport and recreation facilities.

“It is pleasing to see an improvement in the ability of AYDC to engage with Aboriginal culture, given the relatively high ratio of Aboriginal young people in detention,” Custodial Inspector Richard Connock said.

“In another positive, the sport and recreation facilities at AYDC are excellent and my inspection team saw them getting a lot of use during their multiple visits.

“However, there is a lot more that can be done to give young people at AYDC access to religious and cultural programs and increasing time out of room for them to participate in these and in sport and recreation activities.”

Mr Connock also praised an increase in the number of healthier foods available in the canteen.

“Pleasingly, there has been a reduction in the number of high sugar snacks available, and an increase in healthier snacks, along with the order form being colour coded using the traffic light system to provide guidance on healthy options. These changes are in line with recommendations made in the last Wellbeing inspection in 2017,” he said. “Again, though, there is still room for improvement by making the canteen form more accessible for those with low literacy and numeracy skills.”

The report, which was deemed tabled in Tasmanian Parliament today, was compiled as a result of a mandatory inspection by the Office of the Custodial Inspector team of AYDC in late 2022*.

“The inspection standards considered in this report cover a range of topics that contribute to wellbeing, including recreation, religious, spiritual and cultural life, clothing, toiletries and period products, property, allowances and canteen,” Mr Connock said. “I make a total of 13 recommendations in the hope that these will ultimately help to improve the wellbeing of young people in detention.”

Mr Connock noted the Wellbeing report highlighted the same concerns about lockdowns as raised in the [Youth Health Care Inspection Report](#), released last week.

“Time out of room has become an issue of some significance and its impact on the wellbeing of young people in detention is a cause for concern,” he said.

Mr Connock said numerous incidents of lockdown started in 2022 as a result of staff shortages, which had significant flow-on effects.

“Lockdowns are obviously having an impact on young people’s ability to engage in various programs and recreation. This, in turn, no doubt leads to greater frustration and anger amongst young people and ultimately affects their wellbeing,” he said.

Among the recommendations is that the Department for Education, Children and Young People, which is responsible for AYDC, lobby to have time out of room added as an indicator for youth justice services in the federal Productivity Commission’s Report on Government Services.

“This way the data can be compared with other Australian jurisdictions to provide a comparative assessment of performance, based on uniform data,” Mr Connock said.

The report also highlighted the need for more formal processes and documentation around religious and cultural visits to the centre, as well as significant expansion of the Aboriginal cultural program. A number of recommendations relating to these issues are made in the report, including preparation of Memoranda of Understanding with organisations that have staff or volunteers that engage with young people at AYDC.

“It is concerning that there is currently nothing in existence covering these issues,” Mr Connock said. “More broadly, AYDC should consider what its overarching strategy is relating to engagement with volunteers and external organisations for the delivery of religious and cultural engagement services within the centre.

Another area of concern raised in the report was the safety of visitors to the centre, such as staff and volunteers representing external organisations.

“My inspection team spoke with multiple stakeholders involved in supporting the religious, spiritual and cultural life at AYDC who have not received an induction,” Mr Connock said. “They were not aware, for example, of the different security codes and what to do if these codes were called.

“My team also spoke with stakeholders who had last done an induction over a decade ago. They heard one example of a positive induction.

“Regular visitors do not receive radios or duress alarms. My staff also heard of a visitor being accidentally locked in an empty unit for almost an hour before they were discovered.

“AYDC needs to develop, and consistently deliver, a basic induction session for people entering the centre and consider whether duress alarms or radios should be issued to visitors.

“An induction would also be a valuable opportunity to inform visitors about reporting options they can use if they have concerns about the safety and wellbeing of any residents, including concerns about sexual, physical and mental abuse.”

Mr Connock noted that the inspection occurred during the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government’s Response to Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings.

“Our inspection is a point in time inspection, and it is important to differentiate that the matters considered by the Commission of Inquiry stretch over a considerable length of time,” he said. “The case studies referenced in the Commission of Inquiry report are matters for serious reflection and response, but it is also important to emphasise the positive work being conducted at AYDC and my inspection team saw evidence of this during the inspection.”

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Please note the Custodial Inspector is unable to make further comment than what is in this release and the reports.

*The Office of the Custodial Inspector (the Office) is required to conduct mandatory inspections of the state’s custodial centres every three years. To cover all of the Office’s Inspection Standards with the limited resources of the Office, we conduct thematic inspections with the view to reviewing all of the Standards within three years.