

Cleveland Youth Detention Centre inspection report: Focus on separation due to staff shortages

The Cleveland Youth Detention Centre (the centre) is located in Townsville. It accommodates around 100 children and young people, almost all of whom are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The focus of this report is on the use of separation due to staff shortages at the centre.

Our main concerns regarding separation due to staff shortages

For many years, the centre has experienced staff shortages. Under the terms of the relevant certified agreement, the safe supervision ratio within youth detention centres is a minimum of one detention youth worker to four children.

On many days, there are not enough staff to meet this ratio. As a result, the centre regularly locks children in their rooms alone. This practice is known as 'separation'.

Separation can affect children's psychological wellbeing and raises significant human rights issues. It can also make it difficult for children to access services at the centre.

These problems are compounded by the pressures under which the centre operates, workforce issues, ageing infrastructure and poor information systems.

During 2023, the centre's staffing numbers increased. This has enabled the centre to reduce its use of separations and give children better access to services such as education. We also saw examples of innovative practices that were enabling staff to improve services to children while they were separated. While the use of separation in response to staff shortages has reduced at the centre, it has not been eliminated.

We welcome the Queensland Government's acceptance in April 2024 of a recommendation by the Legislative Assembly's Youth Justice Reform Select Committee to ensure youth detention centres have enough staff to remove the need for these types of separations. Local labour market conditions in Townsville may, however, make it difficult for this goal to be achieved at the centre.

Until more staff are available, the centre needs to identify how it can improve the amount of meaningful contact and time out of rooms that children have while separated. The Department of Youth Justice also needs to undertake broader reform of the centre's workforce, infrastructure and systems.

The recommendations we directed to the Department of Youth Justice were accepted in principle by the Director-General. We will monitor the actions taken in response to the recommendations as part of our ongoing program of inspections of youth detention centres.

Our other concerns regarding the centre

We identified other issues of concern about the use of separation at the centre. When the centre uses separation in response to a behaviour incident, it often holds children in rooms with no basic facilities such as a toilet, running water, or bed. In contrast, Queensland adult prisons provide these basic facilities in their detention units. In recommendations 5-8, we have recommended changes regarding this. Also, we identified the need to improve the monitoring of staff who are tasked with observing children when they are separated.

Improvements needed to the Youth Justice Act 1992

Children who are under separation while detained in youth detention centres have fewer legislated safeguards than many of their counterparts interstate. In fact, they have fewer safeguards when separated than adults detained in prisons in Queensland do.

We recommend that the Queensland Government amends the *Youth Justice Act 1992* to address this inequity and protect children.

Cleveland Youth Detention Centre

The centre's operating capacity is 112. Safe capacity is 95 (safe capacity is standardised nationally at 85% of the capacity the centre was built for).

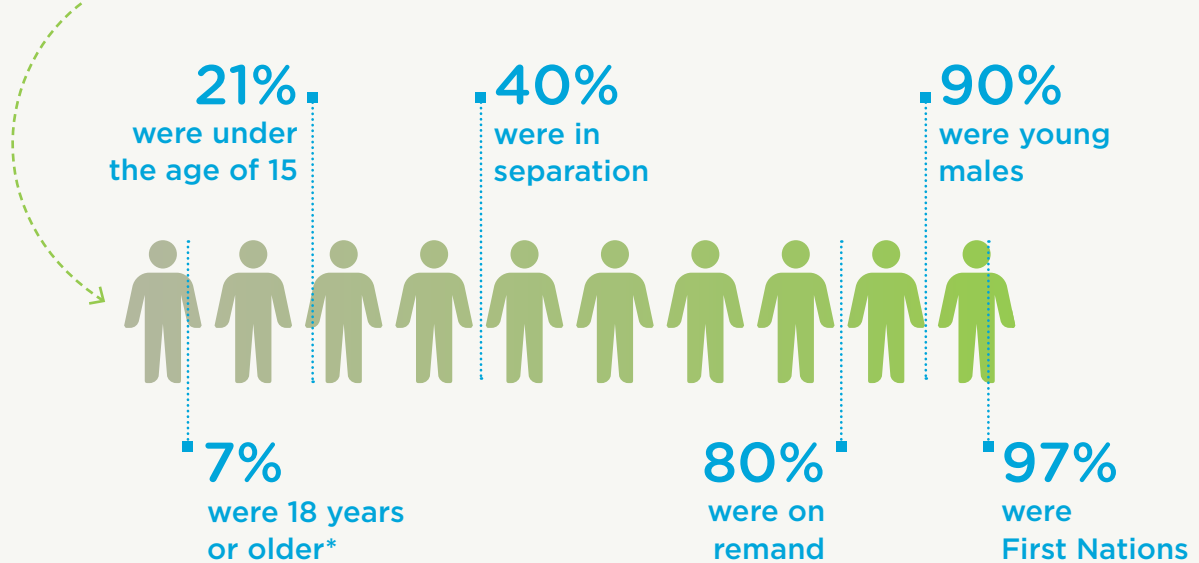
The 15 accommodation units are:

- 2 independent living units (Osprey for boys, Sandpiper for girls)
- 2 girls' units (Jacana and Magpie)
- 9 boys' units (Brolga, Cassowary, Corella, Heron, Ibis, Jabiru, Kestrel, Kingfisher and Kookaburra)
- 2 behavioural support units (Hawk and Lorikeet)



On 20 October 2023:

96 children were being held at Cleveland Youth Detention Centre



Catchment

The catchment is from Rockhampton and north, and out to the NT border



Location

The centre is located on Bindal and Wulgurukaba country in Townsville



Medical

Cleveland Youth Detention Medical Centre is managed by Townsville Hospital and Health Service



School

Cleveland Education and Training Centre is managed by Department of Education

*Some detainees who enter Queensland youth detention centres as children remain in the centre after the age of 18 under the *Youth Justice Act 1992*.