



HM Prison & Probation Service

Dame Meg Hillier MP
Chair of Public Accounts Committee
Houses of Parliament
SW1A 0AA

By email

Amy Rees
Chief Executive
HM Prison and Probation Service
3rd Floor Churchill House
Churchill Way
Cardiff
CF10 2HH

e-mail: DGCEOHMPPS@justice.gov.uk

01 September 2023

Dear / Annwyl Chair,

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE: SECURE SCHOOLS

In July 2022, the Public Accounts Committee published a report into the secure school project. It included the following recommendation (recommendation six):

“The Ministry and HMPPS should set out their evaluation strategy for youth custodial provision, including their specific evaluation plans for the Keppel Unit at HMYOI Wetherby and the first secure school.”

In August 2022, the Ministry accepted the recommendation and, in our response, set out that an internal review of the Keppel Unit had been conducted, considering HM Inspectorate of Prisons findings, the model of care for the Keppel Unit, and a needs analysis across the wider estate. We have since used its findings, alongside work done for the secure children's home re-commissioning project and findings of the COVID-19 research and evaluation programme, to review the use and configuration of the youth estate.

I wrote to you again in March of this year to confirm our plans to commission an evaluator to perform a feasibility study for evaluation of the first secure school in the 2023/24 financial year. This work is still on track, and I am writing to you now with a further update on our plans.

By the end of this calendar year, we intend to have commissioned an independent external evaluator to conduct the evaluation. We will ask this evaluator to conduct three strands of work:

- Firstly, a feasibility study. This will assess the viability of different evaluation methodologies and determine the most appropriate to provide robust data. It will also look to explore the use of a comparator or control group/s elsewhere in the estate to understand how outcomes for children and staff achieved at the secure school may compare to other youth custody sectors. If a comparator group is not deemed feasible, it will recommend which alternative methodologies may be most suitable. The

feasibility study will therefore inform the final scope of the process and impact evaluations. This will take place before the school opens.

- Secondly, a process evaluation. This will assess what can be learned from how the secure school is being delivered, including whether it is operating as intended, the enablers and barriers to effective delivery, and how live operational delivery (and potential future delivery) could be improved. It will examine, among other things, what role the legal and contractual framework, the choice of building and physical environment, and the provider's operating model have had in effective delivery of the intended policy. This evaluation will start whilst the school is preparing to open and is expected to assess delivery over the first two years.
- Thirdly, an impact evaluation. This will assess the extent to which the secure school has achieved its desired outcomes around education, health, safety, behaviours, and any other impacts on children and professionals. If a comparative method is deemed feasible, this will also include how this compares to other youth custody sectors. This evaluation will start after the school opens and is expected to assess impacts over the first three years. The level of confidence in the impact evaluation findings within the first three years will depend on the outcome of the feasibility study. For example, the sample size could mean findings should be treated as only indicative until a larger number of children have experienced the secure school model.

The evaluation overall is expected to include a combination of primary quantitative and qualitative data collection along with analysis of administrative data. It will seek to engage a range of stakeholders involved in the design and delivery of the secure school approach, including children in custody.

Over the longer-term, as we gather more data from reoffending statistics and other long lead-in sources, the Ministry will conduct an economic evaluation of the impact of the school. The scope of this would be determined by the impact evaluation data available but is expected to involve monetising the outcomes achieved using a cost-benefit analysis to explore whether the school represents good value for money, potentially including comparisons to other youth custody sectors.

On conclusion of the evaluation, the Ministry will publish key reports, in line with Government Social Research protocols, summarising the findings on GOV.UK.

Yours sincerely/ Yn gywir,



Amy Rees
Chief Executive, HM Prison and Probation Service
Prif Weithredwr, Gwasanaeth Carchardai a Phrawf EM