

Media release



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‘SIGNIFICANT INCONSISTENCIES’ COMPROMISE SAFETY AND WELLBEING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Custodial Inspector Dr Grant Davies has highlighted systemic issues related to transporting children and young people to and from Ashley Youth Detention Centre (AYDC), resulting in safeguarding gaps that compromise their safety and wellbeing.

Dr Davies said his Office’s [*Security contractor transport of young people in custody: safeguarding review 2025*](#), which was tabled in State Parliament today, revealed “significant inconsistencies” in the Department for Education, Children and Young People’s (DECYP) safeguarding of those in their care when they are being transported from Hobart and Launceston Reception Prisons to AYDC, as well as from AYDC to medical appointments, court and other offsite activities. Most of these journeys are fulfilled by security officers from Essential Security, a private company contracted by DECYP.

Dr Davies said that despite concerns being raised by his office, along with other oversight bodies such as the Commissioner for Children and Young People, over a number of years, private security officers continued to be used for this purpose.

He said while DECYP had some safeguards to protect children and young people during transport, they did not have systems in place to oversee their use and effectiveness.

“Safeguards can only protect children and young people if they are consistently applied, meaningfully embedded and overseen by robust internal systems as well as independent bodies,” he said.

The review was prompted by an incident in late 2024 when a young person needing clinical attention was being transported from AYDC to Launceston General Hospital and back. Security officers reported that the young person was spitting, so they covered his head with his own t-shirt – creating an improvised ‘spit hood’ - while his hands were handcuffed behind his back. The young person told Custodial Inspector officers investigating the incident that the spit hood made it “hard to breathe”.

“The use of an improvised spit hood had the potential to cause significant physical and psychological harm to the young person,” Dr Davies said. “We understand that staff – whether they be at AYDC, private security officers or hospital staff – have a right to be safe and have made recommendations in relation to this in our report.

“But children and young people in custody must be treated with humanity and respect and not subjected to any treatment that is in contravention of their basic human rights.”

Dr Davies said the use of spit hoods is not legislatively banned in Tasmania. At the time of the late 2024 incident, although spit hoods were not used in AYDC, they were not explicitly banned in policy.

“While DECYP and AYDC have since made steps to rectify this – including communicating to AYDC and Essential Security staff that all spit hoods, including improvised ones, are prohibited – we believe prohibiting spit hoods by law would provide an even stronger safeguard,” he said. “That’s why we’re recommending that the Tasmanian Parliament legislate to ban the use of spit hoods and improvised spit hoods in all circumstances.”

Dr Davies said his inspection team uncovered a number of other systemic issues of concern during their investigations, covering:

- Incident reporting;
- Oversight of use of force, including the use of handcuffs, during transport;
- Screening, vetting and training of private security officers;
- The use of standard vehicles when transporting children and young people;
- Ongoing staff shortages at AYDC; and
- Consistent, therapeutic care for children and young people during transport.

“The review revealed that when young people were offsite, they were cared for by security officers who had not always been approved by DECYP,” he said. “In addition, if the security officers used force on young people while offsite, this was not being adequately reported.

“There were limited mechanisms for overseeing security officers’ conduct. These are safeguards that are embedded at AYDC and should extend to journeys offsite.”

Dr Davies said since his office had started its review in December 2024, DECYP had already made significant improvements, including giving AYDC approval to lease and design a van to ‘accommodate young people safely, securely and therapeutically’. However, broader consideration needed to be given to whether the use of private security officers was the best approach in transporting children and young people to and from AYDC.

“This report makes recommendations to improve safeguarding of children and young people during transport within the current system,” he said. “However, it also considers whether private security officers are best placed to transport vulnerable children and young people, and whether this practice is compatible with the therapeutic care principles DECYP is seeking to apply – not just at AYDC, but across Tasmania’s youth justice system.”

ENDS

NOTE: Correspondence between DECYP Secretary Ginna Webster and the young person involved in the improvised spit hood incident in late 2024 is included as Appendix 1 of the report.

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