

Inspection visit to Emajõgi Study Centre of Maarjamaa Education Council

On 4–5 February 2021, the advisers of the Chancellor of Justice inspected the Emajõgi Study Centre of the Maarjamaa Education Council. The advisers to the Chancellor of Justice and a healthcare expert took a tour of the centre's premises, talked to the staff and pupils and examined documents.

The Maarjamaa Education Council is an educational institution where the services of a closed child care institution are provided to young people (Social Welfare Act § 130¹ et seq.). A minor is subjected to the service by a court order. At the time of the visit, there were 28 pupils aged 13–17 at the Emajõgi Study Centre, 17 of them were male and 11 female.

The group homes of the study centre are cosy. Every young person has their own bedroom, which they can decorate to their liking. The study centre has very good sports and handicraft facilities and there are active hobby groups.

Pupils can meet their family in private in the family house. Young people are also guaranteed privacy during telephone conversations.

The study centre constantly cooperates with young people's relatives, substitute homes, local authorities and other agencies and specialists to provide the pupil with necessary services. It is good that the specialists of the study centre stay in contact with the young person even after they have left the study centre.

The staff of the study centre is supportive. The work of the study centre's nurse left a good impression. Communication between staff and young people is constant and direct. The pupils said that they trusted the staff and generally got along well.

The activities of the study centre are correctly documented. A thorough overview of each pupil's development is prepared. Isolation and extraordinary incidents are also documented separately.

The small group rooms in the study centre must be made more cosier if they are to be used to accommodate students in the future. Upon arrival at the study centre, the young person must be provided with therapy and the support of a psychologist right from the start.

Reducing the minimum time for using the telephone and restricting home visits should not be used as a sanction. Many restrictions and punitive measures imposed on pupils in the group homes are not lawful. Collective penalties are not allowed or in accordance with international standards.

The Chancellor of Justice requests that incidents where a pupil has been placed in an isolation room with an unlocked door be documented and recorded in the general register of use of the isolation room as well. The isolation room usage form must reflect how an attempt was made to resolve the situation before isolating the pupil. Staff must take into account the abilities and state of health of the pupils and avoid activities that may cause severe irritation to young people and result in their isolation.

The Chancellor of Justice asks the educational institution to consider various strategies for dealing with bullying. The abilities and wishes of the children involved in the conflict must also be taken into account. The victim of bullying does not have to feel pressure to formally reconcile

with the bully. Staff need to understand the group dynamics of young people so that instead of resolving the conflict, the measures chosen would not escalate it.

When sending girls on trips, there must be at least one female employee in the accompanying team.