

Inspection visit to the Nõmme tee Department of the Tallinn Centre for Child Security

On 17 December 2015, advisers to the Chancellor of Justice performed a follow-up verification visit to the Nõmme tee Department of the Tallinn Centre for Child Security (hereinafter: Security Centre), to check that the fundamental rights and freedom of children are being guaranteed in the institution. The previous verification visit to the Security Centre took place on 27-28 November 2014. The situation in the Centre has improved compared to last year.

During the follow-up verification visit, 41 children aged 12 to 17 were being provided with social rehabilitation services at the Security Centre. Ten of the children were directed to the Security Centre by the decision of the juvenile committee and 31 children with the letter of referral of local government of residence. Ten of the children were being provided the service for the umpteenth time. The children were living in four departments in the centre – two boys' departments and two girls' departments. Each department housed 9 to 11 children.

During the course of the follow-up verification visit, advisers to the Chancellor of Justice examined the studying and living conditions of children, talked to the staff and children of the institution, and examined the internal documents regulating the activity of the institution. The advisers to the Chancellor of Justice checked the organisation of communication between children and their immediate family, leisure and outdoor facilities; applying physical exercises as punishment and understandability of rules established in the institution and equal treatment of children.

The Chancellor of Justice made the following proposals to the Security Centre:

- adjust the premises, intended for meeting with immediate family, in such a way that it is convenient for the children and their immediate family and to contain the equipment for playing or joint activities;
- honour the privacy of children and their immediate family during the meetings, unless there are justified suspicions that leaving the child alone with the family member is not in the best interests of the child;
- review the times intended for meetings and change them in a way to ensure that meeting the children is made as easy as possible for those interested in meeting the children;
- invalidate the internal instructions of the institutions, according to which one parent may meet the child only once a week and consider each request for a meeting individually, thereby proceeding from the best interests of the child;
- ensure to every child, who so requests, the possibility to spend at least one hour per day in the open air, create more meaningful leisure facilities for children, and organise joint activities on a regular basis;
- abstain from punishing the children by physically burdening them and choose such methods of influence and education that do not jeopardise the children's dignity or feeling of safety;
- continue the efforts to promote closer contacts and discussions between the youth and staff;
- in addition to introducing the rules, provide youth with the opportunity to engage in substantive discussions with the staff regarding these rules, and to participate in the establishment of rules;
- phrase the rules in a simple and understandable manner and make them easily accessible for children (e.g. attaching these to the stand of each department);

- ensure uniform implementation of rules and equal treatment of children in the Security Centre.

The children's psychiatrist, who participated in the verification visit as an expert, made the following recommendations:

- the Security Centre's staff often lacks sufficient medical information, which is necessary for continuing the treatment prescribed to the children, mainly psychiatric treatment, in the Security Centre. A clear legal regulation is needed in order to govern how medical information is transferred from the medical institution to the Security Centre;
- the cosiness of the furnishing in the group rooms differed by groups; there were rooms where you could feel at home and rooms which were quite bleak. Since there was a lack of furniture, the children kept their textbooks and clothes on window-sills and chairs. Some groups had shelves in a common corridor. Many children lack daily study routines when arriving at the centre. A specific place for studying and keeping textbooks supports the development of new habits;
- considering the psychic problems of children staying in the centre it is recommended that there be more pillows, plaid blankets, and soft toys in the group rooms;
- children are staying together in a closed territory for a long period of time; accordingly, it is necessary to ensure that they also feel comfortable while alone inside.