

Report on youth justice: Victorian Ombudsman

Monday 06 February 2017

The Victorian Ombudsman has today tabled a report on the state's youth justice facilities to give Parliament and the public an insight into recent events and to illustrate how the relevant oversight agencies are holding government to account.

Victorian Ombudsman Deborah Glass said the *Report on youth justice facilities at the Grevillea unit of Barwon Prison, Malmsbury and Parkville* represents a continuation of the Ombudsman's longstanding concerns into youth justice.

"I welcome the government's review of youth justice, commissioned last year before the recent troubles, with its focus on long-term and joined-up solutions. The chorus of blame will not make us safer as we worry about youth crime.

"Safety will lie in a system that makes it less likely these young people will be repeat offenders. It is neither in the interests of public safety nor the public purse for young people to become entrenched in a life of crime, cycling through youth justice centres into adult prisons to which all too often they return," said Ms Glass.

Youth justice has attracted considerable media and political attention in recent months amid a series of disturbances at the two previously existing juvenile justice facilities at Parkville and Malmsbury. Severe damage caused by young people during unrest at Parkville led the Victorian Government to gazette a new youth justice centre at the Grevillea Unit in Barwon prison.

The report identifies a shift in offending patterns by some young people held in juvenile justice facilities, with evidence from the Department of Health and Human Services describing the current cohort as: "*... more sophisticated, socially networked, calculated and callous offending, characterised by rapidly escalating levels of violence and disregard for authority and consequence.*"

"My 2015 report into [rehabilitation in prisons](#) illustrated how ill-equipped the correctional system is to deal with young adult offenders. Victoria's dual track system must go on recognising that children - even dangerous children - are different from adults," said Ms Glass.

Another major theme emerging from Victorian Ombudsman enquiries – including visits to the three juvenile justice centres – is that extended lockdowns of young people are contributing to the tension that leads to disturbances.

“It is evident that this is affected by a toxic combination of staff shortages and increasing overcrowding. It is predictable that a regime of lockdowns for young people will create unrest, and equally predictable that more lockdowns will follow that unrest,” said Ms Glass.

Former Ombudsman George Brouwer tabled a report – [Investigation into conditions at the Melbourne Youth Justice Precinct](#) in 2010 that identified flaws within the Parkville facility.

“Among other things, the report noted design features such as a low roof-line allowing detainees to climb onto the roof and ill-placed staircases creating blind spots and posing a safety risk to detainees and staff,” said Ms Glass.

While noting that there had been a substantial response to the previous Ombudsman’s report, including the establishment of Parkville College, Ms Glass noted that the precinct itself still existed and young people were still able to climb onto the roof.

“The record is patchy – successive governments have failed to make the significant investment needed to address the long term issues that are increasingly apparent.

“There is no short-term fix to the serious problems affecting youth justice, which have their origins not only in ageing infrastructure but in the complex interplay of health and human services, education and the justice system.”

Report: [Report on youth justice facilities at the Grevillea unit of Barwon Prison, Malmesbury and Parkville](#)

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