

Commissioning Secure Children's Home Placements in England

Who are What Works for Children's Social Care

WWCSC seeks to improve the lives of children and their families through setting standards in research and generating and collating the best evidence in children's social care.

The importance of evidence based policy in children's social care

Children's services are complex, and our research helps policymakers, practice leaders, and practitioners understand how services work and what their outcomes are for children. By understanding which interventions work, and in what context, we can better support children and families, prioritise the most cost effective interventions, and affect meaningful change.

What we did:

As part of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, WWCSC undertook research to understand:

- What are the main perceived challenges in the commissioning and allocation process for SCHs?
- What are the main stakeholder recommendations to improve the quality of SCHs?

What we found:

- **Sufficiency issues and a lack of oversight** undermine the ability of SCHs to safeguard society's most vulnerable children. There is also **little guidance on supporting young people leaving SCHs**, and no assessment of the impact that SCHs have.
- **Siloed pathways and decentralised commissioning practices** mean that SCHs struggle to meet the needs of children with overlapping needs.
- **The needs of children referred to SCHs have become increasingly complex, but SCHs have not evolved** to meet children's increasing needs, including severe mental health difficulties.
- Occupancy rates are not a meaningful indicator of supply because they cannot capture the complexity of children's needs; a bed might be available but there may not be sufficient staff to meet children's needs which means **occupancy rates in SCHs are low, despite high demand**.

Stakeholder Recommendations:

- Most participants agreed that **a central commissioning unit for all children referred to SCHs should be created to oversee referrals, placements and data**. This would improve coordination among providers and those referring children.
- The **absence of national oversight and procedures was considered highly problematic by most interviewees**, particularly for the transitioning process and in terms of understanding the impact of SCHs.