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16 June 2022

Mr Leo Ratledge
Co-Director
Child Rights International Network

Paul Joyce HMI
Deputy-Director
Further Education & Skills

Sent by email c/o: charlotte@crin.org

Our ref: 469135

Dear Mr Ratledge

Army Foundation College, Harrogate

Thank you for your letter of 26 May 2022 to the North East, Yorkshire and Humber ex-Regional Director, Emma Ing HMI. I have been asked to respond in my capacity as Deputy Director, Further Education and Skills.

You raise a number of points in your most recent letter that I believe were dealt with in our previous correspondence of December 2021. I will try to offer further clarification, and respond to any additional points you make.

As was said in previous correspondence, some of your comments may be better directed at the Army, including concerns about data, complaint investigations and records. Should you have evidence of more recent allegations of abuse, may I please urge you to contact the police, the Army and the local childrens' safeguarding board so that these can be properly investigated by the relevant authorities. As we have previously stated, Ofsted does not investigate Services complaints, nor do we play any part in Army disciplinary processes or prosecutions.

You refer to the 'drop-out rates' from the Army Foundation College (AFC) Harrogate. You suggest that we make comparisons between AFC Harrogate and civilian colleges, and draw the same conclusions as we might about retention data from such colleges. AFC Harrogate is not a civilian sixth-form or further education college, despite the inclusion of 'college' in its title. It is an Army initial training establishment, and we

inspect it as such. We cannot make meaningful comparisons between institutions that are entirely different in purpose and character.

During 2020-21, the year that AFC Harrogate was subject to inspection, the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on retention of recruits in many establishments. Inspectors duly took this into account when making judgements about retention in Armed Forces training establishments, including AFC Harrogate, in line with our current handbook and framework for inspecting initial training for the Armed Forces.

Military training is arduous, and some people decide that it does not provide the career path they wish to follow at that time in their lives. We have repeatedly made recommendations in our annual reports to the Ministry of Defence (MoD) about potential recruits needing better information from Armed Forces Careers Information Offices before they embark upon military careers.

You say that AFC Harrogate recruits have no legal right to leave training early. This is not the case. We have checked again with the MoD on the situation regarding recruits under the age of 18 who wish to leave training. The MoD have confirmed that such recruits are not subject to the same notice period as older recruits. Under the Army regulations you refer to in your letter, that govern the rights of Army personnel to discharge, commanding officers are given discretion to immediately discharge those junior soldiers who wish to leave. This is the case at AFC Harrogate, and no junior soldiers have to remain after they have expressed a desire to discharge. Should you wish further clarification or evidence, it would be appropriate for you to contact the Army. As our previous letter and annual report stated, those who choose to leave training get very good levels of support to return to civilian life following their discharge.

You raise again a number of historical complaints, including parental statements linked with those. I am unable to comment on specific cases. In our last letter to you, we explained that inspectors check that any serious complaints raised since the previous inspection, such as those you refer to, have been appropriately investigated by the proper authorities. This was the case during our inspection. They also check that recruits and trainees understand fully when and how to raise concerns. Again, recruits confirmed their understanding of, and confidence in, processes during our inspection.

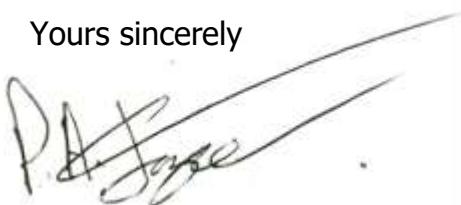
The criteria used to judge care and welfare at a military training establishment are broad, and inspectors explored fully all aspects with recruits and staff before forming their judgements. As we explained in our previous letter, inspectors had unsupervised access to large numbers of recruits and staff and full access to any documentation

required. Recruits at AFC Harrogate at the time of the inspection were clear that they received high-quality training, support, care and welfare.

I fully understand that you wish to share your concerns with Ofsted, and thank you for this. I reiterate that inspectors found no evidence to substantiate your concerns at the previous inspection. Ofsted inspectors have no agenda to pursue, and they inspect each military establishment thoroughly and with rigour. They do this across the Armed Forces, and they act with good knowledge of the military context in which training takes place. When they find concerns, they report on them accordingly, as our annual reports show. As you will see from your reading of last year's report, two establishments were found to require improvement. Inspectors do not overlook or minimise evidence, as you claim in your letter, but follow evidence wherever it leads, in order to make appropriate judgements.

Since the inspection of AFC Harrogate took place, a number of Ofsted personnel returned to the establishment on a non-inspection visit, accompanied by MoD staff, including members of the MoD safeguarding team. They met with staff, looked at facilities and talked to recruits and staff. The visit gave those present no reason to believe that the judgements made in the previous inspection were incorrect. Ofsted will inspect AFC Harrogate again in the normal timescale for a phase 1 military training establishment.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Joyce".

Paul Joyce HMI

Deputy Director, Further Education & Skills