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Ah-nui reunion with mother urged

A TOP-LEVEL report to be released on Tuesday will recommend that five-year-old Kwok Ah-nui and her mother, Miss Wong Yuen-siu, be reunited as soon as possible and allowed to live together under supervision. The report states the separation appears to have been good for the child who has been living at the Chuk Yuen Children Reception Centre.

But the mother, who was sent to Kwai Chung Psychiatric Hospital, appears to have suffered and now seems withdrawn from her surroundings. Ah-nui was snatched from her mother after police and social workers broke down the door of

their flat in Kwai Hing Estate on May 8. The Umelco welfare panel report will come two days before a court case to decide Ah-nui's future begins. The care and protection order placed on her expires on Thursday. The case will be heard in private at Tsuen Wan Magistrates Court.

Members of the Umelco panel who visited Ah-nui last week are happy with the progress she has made since she left the 200 sq ft flat where she was kept virtually all the time by her mother.

Deputy convener Mr Hui Yin-fat said: "She has grown into a charming, pleasant and sociable girl. She is helpful to the oth-

er children in the centre. By contrast, Miss Wong has become withdrawn and silent. The panel believes she could only cope with looking after her daughter if she was under supervision.

Mr Hui said: "The mother was not keen to see the girl. I think this is because she knows the girl is being taken good care of. And now the girl is doing things she was prohibited when she was living at home.

"I don't think Miss Wong belongs in the psychiatric hospital where the other inmates are aggressive . . . she is withdrawn. The sooner she is taken out of that the better it will be. She still

needs treatment but this need not be on an in-patient basis."

The report, which took 10 days to prepare, recommends that the two be reunited and live in some sort of halfway house until they are ready to return to the community.

Panel members will also make specific comments to the Social Welfare Department on how the Ah-nui case was handled. And they will make suggestions on how similar cases should be treated in the future.

The report also recommends that financing should be set aside to hire more social workers so that their case load would be

lightened, a suggestion welcomed by Mrs Anson Chan, director of the Social Welfare Department.

The Umelco report also recommends that the Protection of Women and Juveniles and the Mental Health Ordinance be reviewed as soon as possible.

On Wednesday, Mr Nigel Shipman, the acting secretary for the Health and Welfare Branch, will reply to the report during the last meeting of Legco before the summer recess.

Mr Hui said that if the recommendations in the report were not taken up by the department the panel would demand an explanation.