

CLOVERHILL PRISON VISITING COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2005

Now that 2005 has drawn to a close, I would like to reflect back on some of the important matters arising during the year.

It is with much disappointment and regret that we learn that our Educational Unit is being once again put on hold, even if it is only temporarily.

The first Visiting Committee was appointed to Cloverhill in December 2000 and I was elected to serve as Chairman for the year 2001. From its inception we as a committee were determined from day one that Cloverhill prison should have its own educational unit and we have been pursuing this as our main objective ever since. We are now entering 2006, and the building to house the educational unit was finally completed early in 2005.

We have patiently waited for almost twelve months to see the opening of this unit, and more importantly to see classes of prisoners engaged with their respective teachers.

Cloverhill prison is the only prison that presently does not have a functional education unit and this has a very serious impact on the daily routine of prisoners and prison officers alike. Indeed, when we frequently meet prisoners there are regular complaints about the lack of learning and educational facilities. I know from talking to the Governor and his staff that they are also very disappointed at this further delay in opening the school.

On our visits to other prisons around the country, we have always been drawn to their respective educational and craft making units. It is most discouraging to all, that the take up by prisoners and indeed the rapport and good atmosphere created between prisoners and teacher's is not available in Cloverhill Prison. Therefore, as a committee, we would call on you to see that our educational unit is up and going with immediate effect.

As always we continue to enjoy an excellent relationship with the Governor and his staff. We were sad to see Governor Willie Kane depart in 2005 and we are grateful for his courteous, efficient and helpful assistance during his term as Governor of Cloverhill prison. We wish him well in his retirement. We also wish Chief Officer Martin Delaney every success in his new location, The Midlands Prison. Martin was the first Chief Officer we met in 2000 and he was always on hand when inspecting the prison facilities and familiarising us with the various units.

We had a few disturbing incidents during 2005. One prisoner was severely beaten in the exercise yard but fortunately went on to recover. We have had a number of fatalities the most recent only some two weeks ago. We also had a dreadful attack on two prison officers which only goes to remind us that the level of violence that officers are exposed to, fortunately, this is infrequent.

Throughout the year we as a committee continued to see large numbers of prisoners, we make ourselves available so there is as little delay as possible in getting to see us. There are various issues raised by respective prisoners, screen visits continued to be the main issue, however there is no doubt that the screens together with the netting on the exercise yards is definitely having a good effect on the amount of drugs coming into the prison. During 2005 the number of prisoners was generally below 400, which is in line with the accommodation provision and as such reduces complaints of overcrowding, etc.

During our monthly visits we make a point of visiting the various wings to inspect the specific units, such as kitchen, medical cells, recreation's facilities, exercise yards, meal serving counters, visiting areas and gym. The observation cells were completed in 2005 to a very high standard.

The video conference link is now completed and it is to Cloverhill's credit that the same was located there. We regret that the library is not available to prisoners on a daily basis due to staff shortages.

It is to the disadvantage to Cloverhill prison that on frequent occasion's persons for deportation are housed overnight as this puts additional burden on the officers, which in turn has a knock on effect on the prisoners.

We trust that this report assists in giving an overview of what the Visiting Committee would regard as matters of importance and interest pertaining to Clovehill prison.

Signed on behalf of the visiting Committee:

Fintan Hudson (Chairperson)

Peggy Downey
Christine Ryan
Michael Coyle
Eddie Martin
David Delaney
Fergus O' Tuama
Gerry O' Dea
Tony Williams