

## **St. Patrick's Institution**

### **Prison Visiting Committee Annual Report for year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2005**

We, the members of the Visiting Committee for St. Patrick's Institution are pleased to submit our annual report for 2005 to Mr. Michael McDowell, T.D., Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

The committee met monthly in St. Patrick's Institution and the committee members also carried out in excess of twenty unannounced visits to the prison to ensure that everything in the prison was run in an efficient, fair, safe and humanitarian way and we are pleased to confirm that this has always been the case.

We again wish to place on record that in this institution the welfare of the inmates is of primary concern and wish to record our thanks and appreciation to the Governor and his staff for the excellent management and running of the institution.

#### **Accommodation**

During all of our visits to the prison no instances of overcrowding in the prison were noted or brought to the attention of the committee.

#### **Kitchen**

The kitchen in St. Patrick's is operated to the highest standards in hygiene and service. Food continues to be prepared in a very efficient manner by a very professional qualified staff and members of the prison population who are also employed in the kitchen. The committee support the need for the upgrading of the appliances in the kitchen and we encourage their early replacement.

#### **Education**

The previous visiting committee placed education as the number one priority in our attempts to assist the inmates at this prison to have a normal start on the outside after their sentence is completed. The new committee wish to endorse this prioritisation. St. Patrick's Institution is very lucky with the staff attached to this particular programme and we believe that the school is an excellent facility with excellent teachers. We commend the twenty-eight students who have studied for Junior and the two students who studied for the Leaving Certificate examinations and we are very proud of their results. The committee wish to acknowledge

that this was a large number and it is a challenging experience for the inmates involved. Given the education needs of the inmates the committee would be supporting the expansion of teaching numbers to enable the delivery of a one-to-one ethos of education. This ensures that the schooling, while in prison, can be of maximum impact and benefit to the inmates.

We welcome the improvements, which have been made to the building during the past year.

We would like to congratulate the head teacher Tom Duffy on the excellent work he and his staff are doing.

### **Workshops**

In previous reports we highlighted the necessity for workshops as an integral part of rehabilitation training. Without these facilities life can be very boring for inmates. An integral part of the personal development of inmates has to be providing them with the opportunities to develop new skills. On the 1/1/2004 the workshops were closed due to health and safety concerns as well as the necessity to reallocate staff resources. This has resulted in there being insufficient activities available for the inmates. Throughout 2005 this continued to be an item of major concern to the visiting committee. With the conclusion of the new labour agreement with the POA and the granting of capital to develop new workshop facilities this situation will soon be rectified. The committee strongly welcomes the development of the workshop facilities, which are now near completion, and we look forward to the positive effect, which these workshop courses will have for inmates.

### **Integrated Education Strategy**

The School and the Workshops operate as two separate and discrete activities. The Workshops are treated as industrial training and are not provided as part of the school system. The committee view that the school and the workshops are both part of the same education programme of the prison and we would request that consideration be given to providing greater integration of these education facilities. This can only be of benefit to the inmates and provide a more holistic education and training programme which can be better tailored to meet the specific needs of each prisoner.

### **CCTV**

During the year, the CCTV system and console room equipment was upgraded to a digital system. This has provided greater clarity in pictures

of individuals who are throwing contraband across the wall into the exercise yard. It also supports the detection of items being passed to inmates during visitations. These are all necessary developments in the prevention of drugs and other items being brought into the prison.

The netting that has been installed over the exercise yard in 2004 has proven to be effective in reducing the level of contraband being thrown over the walls. The committee continue to be amazed at the ingenuity being displayed to try and counter the effect of these nets. We compliment the staff in their continued efforts to eliminate the opportunity for contraband to be brought into the prison.

### **Special Observation Cells**

During 2004 construction was completed on two new special observation cells, replacing the old cladding cells. However, when it came to these cells being handed over to the Irish Prison Service for use, a number of design defects were highlighted which has resulted in rework by the builders. We are concerned that such major work can be carried out within the heart of a prison without adequate consultation with the staff who are expected to operate the end product. Whilst consultation in itself will not guarantee that the end design meets all the use demands of a facility, it will certainly reduce the likelihood of it not being acceptable.

These special holding cells are an important part of any prison facility as in many instances the inmates voluntarily request to be put in them for their own protection.

Looking forward to the proposed new prison in Thornton Hall, we believe that it is important that proactive staff involvement (of relevant staff who will operate the unit) in the design of the new facility must be strongly encouraged and facilitated from early design through to completion of the project.

### **Children in custody**

There is no separate detention facility for children between the ages of 16 years and 18 years in St. Patrick's Institution. Even when children are remanded to St. Patrick's the facility for segregation does not exist. In the context of the Children's Act, which is not fully enacted, this is an issue, which we have raised with Governor Lennon. We believe that this is now a priority item for action in the coming year. This will require a significant capital and resourcing commitment to enable full compliance with the act.

**Remand Inmates**

Remand inmates from 16 years and upwards are being sent to St. Patrick's. They end up sharing the same exercise yard as other inmates. Remand inmates need to be kept in separate facilities and should not be mixed with other inmates. There is a need to consider the provision of a remand and assessment centre within the prison if people continue to be sent to this prison on remand.

**D Division**

The Drug Free Wing of St. Patrick's continues to be a success. However, as facilities improve overall in the prison, the relative benefits of being in the Drug Free unit are not as good. We would encourage the ongoing and continued promotion of the Drugs Free unit in the prison and would welcome the identification of suitable incentives which would encourage the greater usage of the Drugs Free Wing.

**Sex Offenders**

There are a small number of sex offenders in custody in the prison. These inmates are located in a separate area of the prison away from the general population for their own safety. Their accommodation is not very satisfactory with poor natural light.

**Visitations**

No inmates requested to see the Committee during the year January 2005 to December 2005. The committee have discussed this issue on a number of occasions and are of the view that this is a reflection of the strong relationship that exists between staff and inmates and should not be viewed as a matter of significant concern. During the year leaflets advising of the role and purpose of the Visiting Committee were distributed to all inmates and all new inmates are advised of the existence and role of the Visiting Committee on entering the prison.

Visiting Committee members did make contact with inmates during visits and those issues that were identified were brought to the attention of the Governor and attended to.

The incoming committee will be seeking to ensure that all inmates are fully aware of the Visiting Committee and its availability to meet with inmates. We will also be seeking to ensure that every opportunity will be taken up to make direct contact with inmates to ensure that problems are not being suppressed either intentionally or unintentionally.

**Staffing**

Throughout the year, due to retirements, transfers sick leave and promotions, as well as awaiting the appointment of staff to new vacancies, the prison has been operating below its full compliment of staff. Following the new pay deal, the annualised hours system is due to commence in St. Patrick's from the 21<sup>st</sup> of January 2006. The committee welcome the conclusion of these industrial relations discussions as it will enable the re-introduction of the workshops and also enable the appointment of staff to the full compliment necessary for the running of the prison. We call for the early and proactive appointment of the necessary staff to fill all the available positions which now exist in the prison.

**Grill surrounding central unit**

The new committee have highlighted to the Governor, the risks which could arise if someone with suicidal tendencies were to get up onto the grill which surrounds the central circle in the core of the building. Currently this grill does not totally block off the access for someone to climb up the grill and go over the top of it. This should be prioritised for action in the coming year.

**Exercise Yard**

The exercise yard, where inmates spend a large proportion of their time, is a very oppressive environment. It is fully concreted, with high fencing surrounds it and the netting on top to prevent contraband being thrown into the yard. There is also wire on the edge of building roofs. Whilst all of these deterrents are necessary and arise from the benefit of experience in needing them, one cannot get away from the fact that the yard is not a pleasant environment. During the coming year we would request that steps be taken to reduce the oppressive nature of the exercise yard.

**Outgoing Committee**

The committee would like to acknowledge our appreciation to the outgoing chairperson Mr. Hugh Lynn for his service on the committee and his stewardship of the committee over the past 12 months.

In the latter part of the year the following outgoing members of the committee concluded their term as members of the visiting committee: -

Mr. Hugh Lynn,  
Ms. Mary Murphy,  
Mr. Noel Clarke,  
Mr. Michael Burns,

We would like to acknowledge their commitment to the Visiting Committee over the past number of years and wish them well for the future.

### **New Committee**

We welcome the decision by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform to increase the level of representation on the committee from the outgoing committee of six to the eight appointees who have accepted their appointment to the incoming committee.

### **Conclusion**

We are pleased to submit this report and feel that St. Patrick's continues to be very well run by a professional Governor and Staff.

We wish to express our thanks for their co-operation and assistance to Governor Lennon, Deputy Governor Murphy, Assistant Governor Hughes and the committee secretary Mr. Paul Flynn and the assistant secretary Ms. Maria Connolly.

We wish to extend our sincere good wishes to the outgoing committee.

The incoming Visiting Committee are committed to fulfilling our function in full and we are looking forward to working in close cooperation with the Prison staff, the inmates, the Irish Prison Services and the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Mr. Michael McDowell, T.D.

On behalf of the Visiting Committee: -

Mr. John Bielenberg  
Mr. Michael Billane  
Mr. Victor Boyhan  
Mr. Gerry Gaughan  
Mr. Anthony Gavin (Chairperson)  
Mr. Denis Murphy  
Mr. Dick O'Leary  
Ms. Catherine Quinn

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Anthony Gavin,  
Visiting Committee Chairperson