

IRISH PRISONS INSPECTORATE

PORTLAOISE PRISON

REVISIT INSPECTION OF PORTLAOISE PRISON:

17th, 18th MAY 2004

Role of the Irish Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention

The Office of the Inspector was established by an order signed by the Minister for Justice Equality and Law Reform on the 21st February 2002. There may be statutory provision in the forthcoming Prisons Authority Bill for the establishment of a Prisons Inspectorate. The following are the terms of reference for the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

To -

- (a) Inspect and report, as the Inspector considers appropriate, to the Minister on prisons and places of detention under the aegis of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.
- (b) Report in particular on conditions in those institutions and on the regimes in place for prisoners and detainees.
- (c) Investigate and report on any specific issue referred to the Inspectorate by the Minister.
- (d) Submit to the Minister an Annual Report on the activities of the Inspectorate.

GUIDELINES:

In carrying out an inspection of any prison or place of detention the Inspector will, in general terms, have regard to such matters as:

- (a) the quality of the regime;
- (b) the attitude of staff and inmates
- (c) health, safety and well-being of prisoners
- (d) the conditions of the buildings
- (e) questions of humanity and propriety;
- (f) any general pattern which may indicate possible inadequacies in the management of the prison

As the terms of reference provide, the Minister may also request the Inspector to investigate and report on specific issues or incidents connected with the running of any prison or place of detention. Furthermore, the Inspector may raise issues of concern, arising out of an investigation or an inspection, either with local management, the Director General of the Prisons or the Minister. To

facilitate the Inspector in carrying out his functions, he may consider complaints from prisoners but only to the extent that such complaints are relevant to the functions of the Inspector. The Inspector will, not later than four months following the end of each calendar year, submit a written report to the Minister on his activities during the year.

It is intended that the annual report will be published. The Inspector will also furnish the Minister with such information relating to his activities as the Minister may require from time to time.

The functions outlined above will also apply to any child detention centres and remand centres designated by the Minister under Section 150 of the Children Act, 2001.

These terms of reference may be further refined in the forthcoming Prisons Bill in the light of the experience gained in the interim. The Inspector will also be entitled to report and make recommendations, in the light of experience gained, on the contents of the legislation which will eventually make statutory provision for the Prisons Inspectorate.

Any enquires or comments about the inspectorate should be directed in the first instance to:

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INDEX

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Background	2 - 3
3.	Governors Briefing	3 - 9
4.	Review of Recommendations	9 - 13
5.	Business Plans (Summary) for Portlaoise Prison 2001 - 3003	14 - 25
6.	Meeting with Head Teacher	25 - 27
7.	Tour of Inspection	27- 30
8.	Summary	30 - 34

1. Introduction

The Inspector Mr. Justice D Kinlen and his special advisor Mr. Jim Woods made a revisit to Portlaoise Prison on 17th and 18th May 2004.

The purpose of the visit was to follow up on points of note and recommendations made arising from the previous full inspection of the prison on 9th, 10th, and 11th December 2002. It was also to examine any significant changes in the meantime and to look at the prison's business plans for years 2001 to 2003 to see if targets set within them had been achieved or completed.

It was not to inspect the whole regimes, facilities, services or management of the prison and the revisit is not to be taken as a full inspection.

It is the intention of the Inspector to revisit within a year or two all prison and places of detention who have had a full inspection carried out and to establish if the findings or recommendations of the full inspection have been eradicated or implemented.

Date:

Mr. Justice Dermot Kinlen
Inspector of Prisons and
Places of Detention

2. Background

Portlaoise Prison is one of the oldest prison in use in the Irish Prison system and is located on the Dublin Road. Portlaoise, County Laois. The prison was built on a 36 acre site, 30 acres of which were used as farmland which supplied the necessary vegetables for use in the prison's population. The farm has ceased operations since late 60's early 70's and it has now been completely built on with the erection of the Beladd House Buildings plus the new Midlands Prison.

It is a high security prison and the prison staff are supported with the aid of the army who patrol the roof of the prison as well as guarding the boundary walls plus the entrances and exits. There is also a constant presence of Gardai on duty at the prison.

The prison mainly consist of two cell blocks both of which operate independent of each other. The "D" block accommodates mainly the prisoners who are transferred from other prisons and who work at the various tasks such as the kitchens, cleaning, grounds, etc while the prisoners accommodated in the E block generally are committed from the special criminal court. There are various groups or categories of prisoners within the E block and generally each category does not mix with each other, consequently each landing or floor operates separately from one/ another and are divided by locked gates. There are times

when there are vacant cells on some of those landings but the fact that the category systems exists only those prisoners attached to that particular category can be placed there. There are no sanitary facilities within the cells and “slopping out” takes place after each unlock. All of the cells are fitted with piped cable t.v’s.

The fact that the various groups or categories of prisoners do not mix with each other means that there are duplication of services being provided in the areas of education, workshops, gyms, exercise yards, etc and management must manage the time and facilities for each group accordingly so that conflict is avoided as far as possible.

The normal chaplaincy educational, library, welfare, medical services are available to the prisoners in the prison.

3. Governor’s Briefing

The inspectorate team were welcomed by the Governor Mr. T. J. Walsh and his Deputy Mr. F. Greaney. We also met the Assistant Governor Ms. E. Gavin on our second day’s visit as well as Chief Officer Connolly.

The Governor stated that he had 127 prisoners in custody on that date and had no prisoners on temporary release.

He then outlined difficulties he was encountering with a particular group of prisoners who were on a form of protest as a result of one of their “members” being refused conditional period of temporary release by the Minister to attend his mother’s funeral. He had been granted temporary release by the Minister to visit his mother at her home when she was very seriously ill a few weeks previously but additional conditions were placed on his temporary release for him to attend her funeral which he refused to accept. He did not attend his mother’s funeral. The group of prisoners to which he is aligned were refusing to go back to their cells after each unlock period and had to be manually placed in their cells by staff. They were not resisting so far but the Governor outlined that it could not continue as he would have to take further action and restrict their out of cell time. However, he hoped some agreement could be reached with the group before it reached that stage.

Mr. Walsh outlined a new buildings programme that is taking place at present replacing the main front gate to the prison with a new gate lock along with a considerable number of new facilities included in the gate lock project. These facilities consist of visitor waiting room which will also have a special childrens area. It will also have tea/coffee making facilities for visitors. It is hoped this service will be run by members of the Vincent De Paul Society or Quakers or both. There will be a new staff locker room with showers and toilets. A new staff and visitors search area, detail offices, control room and C.C.T.V operations station, a new boardroom, office facilities, staff training and new

facilities for the army personnel. The entire front of the prison will be revamped with the existing hedges being removed and replaced with traffic bollards and some parking facilities.

The Governors then showed the inspectorate team maps and drawings of proposed new cell block called "C" wing which is intended to replace the existing "E" block. These drawings are very elaborate and it is planned to have all the necessary services off each floor level such as education, work, work training etc. The top (5th) floor will consist of an extremely large sports hall that can cater for 5 a side football, volleyball, tennis etc. This hall will be multipurpose at the end of it will be a religious centre which will be divided off with timber shutters when not in use for religious purposes. Each cell will have toilet and shower facilities. The cells are designed in such a way as the toilet and shower areas are "en suite". There will be an intercom system into all the cells. Invitations for the tendering contract for this new wing will be going out to the public in the next few weeks.

The Governor outlined that the proposed new wing and the relocation into the new gate lock area will cause considerable disruption to the present facilities and services. The buildings and areas being vacated will have to be knocked to make way for the new building. There will be a new controlled patrol area around the grounds of the prison for the army personnel. The Prison Service are in the process of purchasing a field at the rear of the prison and when this is

complete it will have to be fenced off to prevent public access to this area and thereby prevent illegal articles being thrown over the boundary wall.

The Inspector was also informed that talks are taking place with the Governor of the Midlands Prison and Headquarters regarding the Separation Unit at the Midlands Prison coming under the control of the Governor of Portlaoise Prison. This particular stand alone building is actually closer and more convenient to Portlaoise Prison than to the Midlands Prison. It would appear sensible if it came under the jurisdiction of the Governor of Portlaoise Prison.

The new role of the army regarding the proposed new patrol facilities around the prison as well as the installation of C.C.T.V in the visiting area was discussed by the Governor. The use of the old gate area (present main gate) and it being turned into a museum plus the help and assistance being received from the local historians from the area was also outlined. New facilities over the old gate lock area are to be provided for staff. The old gate museum, when operational, may be open to the public and a fee for entry is being considered. It may also feature in the local tourist guide.

The Governor then outlined that there was no suicide or attempted suicide at the prison since the full inspection. He said he had a meeting with Dr. H. Kennedy Medical Director of C.M.H and he has agreed that Dr. Paul O' Connell a forensic Psychiatrist of his staff will provide a psychiatric service for the prison

and this service will commence shortly. Mr. Walsh also informed the inspectorate team that he had secured the services of a part time doctor from the locality who provides 21 hours medical services per week. In this doctor's absence the service is provided by her husband who is also a doctor. The Governor is very satisfied with the services being provided. He said that the present dispute with the Prison Services medical doctors so far has not effected Portlaoise Prison and he hopes it will remain that way.

Regarding the psychological service to prisoners the Governor stated that he now has a psychologist one day per fortnight. The psychologist is attached to Limerick Prison and he is hoping to get a one half day per week service which he considers would be sufficient.

The prison has now got five qualified state registered nurses, one of whom was a former medical orderly. He got leave to go off training qualified and is now back working in the prison.

The Inspector asked about new committals being seen by the Probation and Welfare staff and the shortage of probation staff. The Governor informed him that there was no change in the number of personnel from the time of last inspection and that all new committals are seen by the Probation and Welfare Officer within three days of arrival at the prison.

The Governor was asked about accommodation for prisoners on leaving the prison and was informed of the Governor's fund with nobody leaving without at least €100.00 at their disposal. The Governor then outlined a pre-release programme which is run by the Head Teacher and is operating very successfully. This is a new programme for prisoners since the last inspection.

The Inspector enquired if "hoosh" was being made by the prisoners to which the Governor responded that it is found fairly regularly on searches and outlined the punishment imposed on those prisoners found with same. He also spoke of measures being taken to prevent as far as possible its manufacture. No prisoner has ever been hospitalised as result of drinking it.

Enquires were made of the Governor as to the practice of hepatitis vaccine being provided for staff to which he said that it is being worked on at present and staff were in the process of receiving same.

The Governor informed the Inspector that the prison kitchen had achieved the hygiene mark award this year for the first time. He also outlined the changes made at the serving of the food that proper serveries are now used and the serving of all food from bain marias on landings has ceased. A specific area on E1 has been converted into a servery by turning two or three cells into one open space.

The question of serving the prisoners mid day meal at tea time and replacing the tea time meal with the lunch was raised by the Inspector as he had raised this issue in other prisons where the prisoners complained that they were hungry during the night. He said that some Governors wanted to change but were not allowed by their fellow colleagues as there was a different menu cycle in other prisons and prisoners are transferred regularly from one prison to another. The Governor produced a 28 day cycle menu which had been prepared by the Governor group and approved by a dietician and headquarters. This new menu was coming into operation on 26th June 2004 in all prisons. The question of what time the main meal should be served to prisoners can then be decided by the individual prison's management and look at what is most suitable for that particular prison.

The Governor informed us that he is planning to provide clothes lockers on each landing to do away with the present practice of prisoners clothing hanging from the mesh wire of the landings which is most untidy looking. If this were successful it would improve the appearance of the wing considerably.

This concluded our meeting with the Governor. He provided the inspectorate team with tea/coffee and mid day meals which were much appreciated.

The Inspectorate team then referred to the recommendations contained in the prison's full inspection report which took place on 9th, 10th and 11th December

2002 to establish if they had been acted upon. Herewith is the review of the recommendations.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That an appointment of an additional full time Probation and Welfare Officer be assigned to the prison. Page 10 5.1 (a)

Result: Has not happened [Part - time still in existence]

- (2) That a citizen's advice type facility should be established in the prison. Page 10, 5.1(b).

Result: Pre - release programme introduced and representative from various services come in and talk to the prisoners and hopefully a post release programme may be introduced next year.

- (3) That the I.P.S Headquarters set up meeting with other Government Agencies responsible for housing and social welfare issues regarding prisoners entitlements. Page 12, 5.1(e).

Result: No progress made in this area

- (4) That local management make decisions on non medical issues so that the doctor's time is not wasted. Page 16, 5.3(d)

Result: Any item of non medical nature will be dealt with by local management in agreement with the prison doctor. Such issues are no longer a matter for the doctor. The doctor will change diet for a prisoner for medical reasons, but otherwise diets are the standard approved for the service. Doctor does not interfere in same.

- (5) That the appointment of the doctor, psychologist, updating of files and facilities and supply of medicine (weekends) to be expedited immediately by the Irish Prison Service Headquarters Page 18, 5.3(i).

Result: Done. Local doctor and a psychologist appointed and available. Medicine at weekend available from chemist on call and files updated. Medical record system on computer but operated by nurses or medical orderly only.

- (6) That local management arrange to install another telephone for the use of prisoners on E2 landing. Page 23, 5.4(j)

Result: Additional hand set phone available. [card system not in operation] Not placed permanently on the landing the number of

prisoners numbers on this landing has decreased since previous inspection and demand for same not as great.

- (7) That local trades staff examine this gate on a regular basis and if found faulty to have same replaced. Page 23, 5.5(a)

Result: Outside contractor renovated the gate this week and it is now working perfectly

- (8) That the I.P.S. Headquarters addresses the issue of prisoners with mental problems being detained in prisons. Page 25, 5.5(g)

Result: New arrangements with Central Mental Hospital may improve the situation. Not up and running yet but should come in to operation in next few weeks.

- (9) That local management have toilet/shower facilities in exercise yard brought up to an acceptable level of hygiene and whatever repairs/replacement work needed to be carried out immediately. Page 30, 31 6.6(e).

Result: Toilets renovated. Showers not in use as showers inside the prison are sufficient. The shower cubicles are now permanently blocked up.

- (10) That the Headquarters examine the situation regarding staff training in general (especially B.A training in view of the age profile of the staff involved). Page 40, 7.5.

Result: Staff resources did not allow for staff training and in view of the recent cutbacks the situation is even worse

- (11) That a decision should be made immediately by the Irish Prison Headquarters concerning the future use of D Block and if it is to continue (against my advice) as cellular accommodation that a smoke extractor system should be installed. Page 40, 7.6.

Result: Not feasible to be adopted for any use at present. Governor wants decision from headquarters this year regarding its future use.

- (12) That in view of the age and condition of the prison consideration should be given to rebuilding the whole premises. The Inspector strongly recommends the demolition of the prison. Page 29, 6.4 and Page 32, 6.9(c)

Result: The redevelopment of the prison has commenced and likely to take up to seven years to complete fully.

(13) Provision of an adequate and complete CCTV system immediately.

Page 46

Result: Its going into new gate lock - being extended to the various areas within the prison and should be completed within two years from now.

So of the 13 recommendations made five have been full acted upon, five have not been carried out while three have partly been carried out with work still to be completed on them.

5. Business Plans (Summary) for Portlaoise Prison 2001 - 2003

The Inspectorate then proceeded to discuss the business plans for Portlaoise Prison for years 2001 - 2003 and ascertain if the targets set had been achieved or reached. Herewith are the findings:-

Strategy. 2: Ensure safe custody of prisoners.

Target 2:1. Devise standard arrangements for the recording of assaults in the prisoner population by the end of 2001.

Result ; Not completed

Target 2:2. Conduct annual audit of prisoner assaults w.e.f. 2002 & implement whatever action is appropriate to address the situation.

Result; Done

Strategy 3. Provide appropriately secure custody for prisoners.

Target 3:1. Introduce an annual review of security at the prison commencing in Jan 2002.

Result; yes on-going, army, gardai, involved in prison security meeting each month

Target 3.3. All closed prisons to have CCTV in visiting rooms by end of 2002.

Result; Not completed. To be completed by mid 2004

Target 3.4. Using the prisoner record information system to generate a prisoner profile in respect of each prisoner due to be escorted outside the prison w.e.f. January 2002.

Result; Not done. Software not available at this prison until very recently.

Strategy 4. Manage the custodial function so that it supports positive prison regime.

Target 4.1. Make provision in the business plans for maximum take-up of places in prison education, training and employment facilities by Jan 2002.

Result; Education=60% to 70% take up. Not in training or employment

Strategy 5. Plan to meet emergency situations. (fire, hostage-taking, riot.)

Target 5.1. Business plan to provide for maintaining an adequate standard of preparedness in relation to emergency planning at the prison by Jan 2002.

Result; Yes has taken place

Implement training for all staff by June 2002. Result; Not done (some little only)

Concur on joint plan of action with Midlands Prison in the event of serious emergency by July 2002.

Result; yes done and meetings held.

Review command room facilities by July 2002. Result;Done

Implement security committee's recommendations by June 2002.

Result; Yes any of the recommendations that were feasible.

Target 5.2. Finalise arrangements with Fire Authority by end of 2001.Result;

Done

Inspection of prison by local Fire Chief & watch Commanders by DEC 2001.

Result; Done

Target 5.3. Prepare a detailed video of the prison by June 2002, for reference in the management of an emergency situation.

Result;Not done

Strategy 6. Provide for the personal well-being of prisoners.

Target 6:1. Make arrangements for a designated drug free area in the prison by end of 2003.

Result; No progress on this front.

Target 6:2. Multi-disciplinary suicide prevention group at prison to meet quarterly to review implementation of suicide prevention measures & consider new initiatives.

Result; Yes on going.

Representative of the group to participate in an annual forum to facilitate information sharing.

Result; No forum held in order to participate. These forums are organised at Headquarters level.

Strategy 7. Help prisoners maintain their relationship with family and the community.

Target 7.4. Make provision in the business plans for measures to be put in place by the end of 2001 to help prisoners keep in touch with the wider community through improved access to the written & spoken word.

Result; Newspapers made available and televisions in all cells.

Strategy 8. Ensure medical & psychiatric care for prisoners to a standard consistent with that which applies in the general community.

Target 8.1. Implement all accepted recommendations, subject to resources, contained in the report of the prisoner health care review group by the end of 2003.

Result; No progress from national team.

Target 8:4. Improve necessary links with the wider community to ensure continuation of medical treatment for prisoners at the times of committal & release by July 02.

Result; Link up with local hospital on committal but not on release.

Strategy 10. Provide quality care for prisoners consistent with community standards.

Target 10.3. Complete a first evaluation of practice against defined care standards by the end of 2003.

Result; Not done.

Strategy 11. Elaborate positive sentence management.

Target 11:3. Maintain the prisoner participation rate in education at 50% against the background of increases in the prisoner population.

Result; Yes achieved above target.

Maintain the present practice of individual interviews of each prisoner on committal by the teaching staff.

Result; Yes being done

Identify current problems & assess future needs of educational provisions.

Result;Yes

Establish a multidisciplinary committee to ensure education is meeting the needs of prisoners in all aspects of prison regime by May 2002.

Result; Yes being done

Establish a monitoring group to check if goals of Education Unit's Organisational Statement are being achieved by December 2002.

Result; Not being done as far as we are aware but outside V.E.C members to do same?

Assign a panel of officers to education, similar to other posts, by APR 02.

Result; Yes done

Target 11:5. Extend parenting courses to all prisons, where they are appropriate, by December 2002.

Result; Not done. Very little interest by prisoners in this programme. Survey conducted on same.

Target 11:6 Implement the recommendations of the report of the physical education development group "Physical education in the Irish prison system" by Jan 2002.

Result; Yes done.

Target 11:7. Introduce the CONNECT project in the prison by end 2003.

Result; No not on agenda of this prison

Target 11:8. Implement accepted recommendations of the prison-based Drug Treatment Review Group by the end of 2003.

Result;Not done. No treatment programme being operated

Appoint drug treatment committee by August 2002.

Result;Not applicable

Conduct training programme for staff.

Result;Not done. No need as no programme

Develop and implement plan by end 2003.

Result;Not done as above

Strategy 12. Develop and maintain activity programmes for prisoners.

Target 12:1. Implement the structured plan to improve prison library services by end of 2002.

Result ; Yes being done on ongoing basis

Target 12:2. Make provision in the business plan for a programme of interaction with the wider community by December 2001.

Result; Not done [some outside groups come into the prison]

Target external agencies, enhance existing links, and implement new programme by end of September 2002.

Result ; Not done

Strategy 13. Address offending behaviour.

Target 13:1. The prison to deliver at least one multidisciplinary programme per year addressing offending behaviour relevant to the prison's population from 2002 onwards.

Result; Yes pre-release programme implemented

Strategy 14. Evaluate effectiveness of prisoner programmes.

Target 14:1. Evaluate the effectiveness of all prisoner programmes by end 2003.

Result; No action

Establish committee, evaluate, develop plan, & implement by DEC 2003.

Result; No not done

Strategy 14:2 Ensure that at least 50% of work training courses are pursued to recognised certification levels by end 2003.

Result; no work training programmes in prison except kitchen area.

Establish a training / employment committee, include courses in staff training, manual handling, kitchen hygiene, kitchen safety, F.E.T.A.C., & Leonardo and assess feasibility of work training programme of these courses by Feb. 2003.

Result ; Not applicable to Portlaoise Prison

Implement agreed programme with quarterly review by Nov. 2003.

Result; Not applicable

Strategy 28. Implement the Strategic Management Initiative in the Prison Service.

Target 28.1. Prepare by DEC 2001, business plans for each prison & H.Q. Directorate.

Result; Done

Specific to Portlaoise Prison.

Strategy 1. Set up proper cleaning & rubbish disposal procedures and have same working by the end of June 2002.

Result; Yes in place and waste management programme in operation. Jointly with Midlands Prison

Strategy 1. Ensure a smooth transition to EURO currency with effect from January 1st 2002.

Result ; Done

Strategy 1. To have non-smoking areas and policy within the prison for staff and prisoners and to have education programmes re same by Sept. 2002.

Result; Done and reviewed in accordance with the new act

Improve energy efficiency in light, heat, water and effluence by March 2002.

Result ; No not possible but new building will have the necessary equipment to regulate same.

The summary outlines 43 targets set with additional four strategies specific to Portlaoise Prison and of these forty three targets, 19 were completed on time with targets met, 21 were not completed or reached, while 3 were partly or in the process of completion. The four strategies that were specific to Portlaoise Prison three of these were completed and are up and running while one was not reached as result of the necessary equipment not being available.

6. Meeting with Head Teacher

The Inspectorate had a meeting with the head teacher Mr. Mark Kavanagh who gave an account of the pre-release programme for prisoner that was introduced since the last inspection. He outlined that he appointed one of his teachers as the co-ordinator between the services/professionals within the prison and those on the outside attached to the various agencies or organisation. The courses take place in one of the classroom. The first group of prisoners were from the "D" Block who are the "ordinary" working prisoners but the programme has now attracted prisoners from "E" Block starting with those on E1 and spreading to E2, E3 and E4 prisoners who heretofore would not participate in such a programme.

The programme consists of several modules with the Probation and Welfare Officer attached to the prison delivering the anger management module for six weeks in which eight prisoners took part. The "safe pass" module was delivered by a person from Fas from Portlaoise town and deals with safe operations/working conditions on a construction site and in fact is essential that anyone commencing work on a building site must possess the safe pass card. Fifteen prisoners will have taken part on this course since last September until the end of June this year. Through the local town's own citizens advice bureau, one of their members attends the prison each Monday and gives information on entitlements such as social welfare, housing, accommodation, etc. This has led

to the local Community Welfare Officer undertaking to come in to the prison and give information on the services provided by him or her which is due to commence in June.

There is a National fund set up known as “educational trust” which is reserved mostly for subversive prisoners on release who wish to continue in education having already obtained a suitable grade within prison. However, it was found to be difficult to be accepted onto one of these courses as it was felt that they had to go through several sections before final decisions were reached and it proved frustrating for those applying. The programme co-ordinator has succeeded in getting a person from the trust to come into the prison one day a week and talk to the subversive prisoners about the Trust, its function, how to overcome any obstacles and who to contact, etc. So this is now working quite well. The head teacher outlined that there was a very talented prisoner in the prison who obtained high marks in music and had now qualified to enter Trinity College and has been placed on the waiting list for that University. He has also been accepted into a D.I.T College.

The other areas covered on the programme include talks on general health, diets etc, which is delivered by the nurses attached to the prison. There are also talks on budgetary matters and how to run a household as economically as possible. They also conduct interview skills courses in which a C.C.T.V camera is used and the video of the interview is rerun to the participants with both good and bad points highlighted. The lay out and preparation of C.V's is also covered

on the programme by the teacher. Another section of the course titled “thinking out” is delivered in which the prisoners are asked to think that they are released and to consider the difficulties they may encounter in their everyday life.

Discussions/ debate takes place on how to manage and cope with same after perhaps having completed a considerable length of prison sentence. This also highlights the change that has taken place in society in general while they were serving their sentences and being unaware or ill informed of such change. The course also opens up avenues and leads to networking regarding facilities and services that are available, which are outlined by the citizen advise personnel, the community welfare officer, or contacts that can be made by the probation and welfare officer or the educational opportunities.

The Inspector thanked the head teacher for meeting the inspectorate team and outlining the programme that his teacher is so efficiently co-ordinating. He thought the work being carried out was very worthwhile and very beneficial to the prisoners. The head teacher acknowledged the Inspector’s kind remarks and said he hoped to commence a second course to cater for a post release programme in the coming year.

7. Tour of Inspection

The Inspectorate team accompanied by the Deputy Governor visited the new main gate entrance area plus all of the new facilities being provided adjacent to

the new main gate. The work was in full swing and the foreman very kindly gave us a conducted tour of the entire buildings. The new facility is under the sole control of the contractor and is not due to be handed over to the prison authorities until the work is complete which is expected to be next September or October. The main construction of the buildings are in place and work is very much on going to reach their targeted completion date. All of the facilities as outlined in the Governor's briefing was very evident and it is marvelous to see this work in progress in replacing fairly quickly the old dilapidated buildings which are long gone past their sell by date. It was also good to note that the new entrance gate will facilitate a fire brigade or other such emergency vehicles entrance to the prison as heretofore such emergency vehicles had to gain access via the back gate and then make their way around the grounds to the front of the prison.

The temporary office/administration building at Limerick Prison has been dismantled and is now being re-erected at Portlaoise Prison with an additional section made of similar material being added to it. This building will accommodate the staff and services that have to move from their present locations in order to clear the area for the proposed new wing. The building was at an advanced stage of completion with painters working on the outside of same.

The inspectorate team accompanied by the Deputy Governor and Chief Officer then inspected the isolation area and spoke with two of the prisoners held there. One of the prisoners was there as a result of a P.19 [misconduct report] while the second prisoner was there for his own protection to be away from other prisoners who had attempted to injure him. It was good to observe that the prisoners who were involved in the hostage taking incident in Mountjoy Prison were removed from this unit having spent several years there.

The next areas visited were the two exercise yards in which the toilets and showers were found to be in need of being brought up to an acceptable level of hygiene at our previous inspection. The showers were locked and not used any more and the staff state that there are sufficient showers on the landings of the prison for the prisoners' use. The toilets area have been painted and the bowls and urinals have been cleaned and brought to an acceptable level of hygiene. The painting could do with being redone as it appears to be chipping/flaking and coming off the wall.

There is a hand ball alley in one of the exercise yards visited and while there discussion took place concerning its use and frequency of use. Some of the prisoners in the yard observed us looking at the alley and approached us to outline how important the handball alley was for them and its daily use. They said that whatever repairs or replacements were needed, that a handball alley

was essential for their recreational needs. So the prisoners felt very strongly about the retention of the handball alley.

We then proceeded through "E" block where we observed the prisoners clothing and some of their personal belongings hanging on the wire mesh of the landings thus giving an untidy impression of the entire wing. The Governor had outlined plans to have lockers placed off the landings to do away with this present practice.

The Inspectorate then looked at the newly refurbished servery area for the serving of prisoners meals on E1. This is a good improvement on the previous servery facility where their meals were collected on the open landing. The new area was clean and tidy.

On leaving E1 wing we were shown the gate that was malfunctioning and the repairs that had been carried out to it. It was working perfectly on our entrance and exit from the wing, so the contractor's work appears to have been successful.

8. Summary

The visit to Portlaoise Prison on this occasion compared to our full inspection in December 2002 was entirely different in that now there are several groups of outside contractors working flat out at the new main gate facility and at the

building being re-erected which they received from Limerick Prison. There is a great “buzz” of work being done although it does bring its problems with scaffolding, hoardings, security issues, etc operating hand in hand with the prison’s operations. The previous visit did not give the impression of much being done or happening although we know that plans for this refurbishment work was at the drawing board stage.

The Inspector is delighted with the new building work being done and hopes the planned new C wing to replace the E wing will commence as soon as possible. The future plans for the “D” wing appears uncertain and it is in worse state of repair than “E” wing, so its present existence should be decided and either replaced or relocated. It appears to take years from the time of decision to replace or rebuild until final completion so the sooner the better a decision is made on this wing’s future.

There were 13 recommendations made arising from the previous inspection and of these 5 were acted upon, five were not implemented, while 3 others are not complete but planning or work has commenced on them. It is disappointing that a full time probation and welfare officer has not been appointed. The citizens advise facility has been introduced into the pre-release programme but the accommodation and social welfare issues have not been addressed. It is good that the prison now has a part time doctor and her appointment is most welcome. The arrangements for her replacement when she is off is also

welcomed. The local management should be complemented on securing the services of this doctor. It is good that arrangements are now made with the doctor concerning the doctor's dealing with non medical issues and that her time is not wasted when she visits.

The services of a psychologist for a day every two weeks is an improvement on none but it appears very little time for such important work. The Inspector would like to see a psychologist attend the prison at least one day per week.

It is good that additional nurses have been assigned to the prison and that the medical files are updated. The problem with the supply of medicine at weekends is now resolved. It is a pity that the I.T facility is not been operated by the doctor in view of the costs of having same installed and its benefits.

The issue regarding prisoners with mental health problems still exist although the recent arrangement with the Central Mental Hospital when operational may help. The fact that there is a psychiatric hospital within a few hundred yards from the prison is still being ignored and it is an amazing waste of taxpayers money in conveying prisoners up and down to the Dublin based psychiatric hospital.

The work to upgrade the malfunctioning gate and the upgrading of the hygiene in the toilets in the exercise yards have been completed. The recommendation

regarding C.C.T.V installation has been taken into consideration in the new facilities at the new entrance gate area.

Staff training has not been undertaken and in fact appears to have got worse since our inspection with the further cutbacks in overtime due to budgetary restraints imposed by the Minister. The Governor outlined that a training programme is being drawn up but as to when it is going to be delivered is another matter.

It is good that there appears to be a commitment to rebuild the entire prison which the Inspector welcomes. The fact that it is over a seven year period appears a long time although the work involved is considerable but hopefully the finance required for same will be forthcoming over that length of time. There could be several changes in Ministers for Finance and each may have other priorities!!

In relation to the business plans for the prison for the years 2001 to 2003 there were 43 general targets set with completion dates as well as four specific targets relating solely to Portlaoise Prison. [While they all related to Portlaoise Prison some were general to all the prisons]. More than half of the general targets were not met and three out of the four relating specifically to Portlaoise were met. If only half of the targets are reached it raises the question whats the purpose in having business plans? A considerable amount of time, energy and

papers work has gone into drawing them up and if the targets and deadlines are not reached or are ignored then the process is a complete waste of time and money. It is another example of Parkinsons Law!

I am delighted that the “defaulters” or those prisoners who were involved in the hostage situation in Mountjoy Prison have been moved into the general prison population and indeed some to other prisons. The Governor and staff are to be congratulated on achieving their transfer from the isolation area where they have spent so many years. This area is unsuitable for prisoners to be held there on a long term basis and if ever (hopefully not) a similar situation arose, then a structured regime must accompany them with a progressional system built into it, which would lead to eventual transfer if they reached their goals.

The prisoners held in the “D” block continue to perform work tasks around the prison such as kitchen, cleaning, grounds work, trades work, etc while those held on “E” block are still mostly involved in gym or education. Security and containment is the main focus on this group but this gives them very little outlet or variety. There are no work training programmes available or no connect projects. The introduction of the pre-release programme is welcomed but more such programmes could be introduced.

The parts of the prison the inspectorate walked around were clean and hygienic. There appeared to be quite good morale among the staff. The amount of gates

that staff have to operate manually does not lead to wonderful job satisfaction. Developmental training is so urgently required in areas where job satisfaction is hard to come by, perhaps more automatic operation of such doors and gates with modern electronic equipment would improve the situation.

The Inspectorate team wish to thank the Governor and staff for the hospitality extended to them and for providing a room and facilities for their use during their visit. It was much appreciated.