

St. Patrick's Institution

Prison Visiting Committee Annual Report for year ending 31st December 2007

We, the members of the Visiting Committee for St. Patrick's Institution are pleased to submit our annual report for 2007 to Mr. Brian Lenihan, 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 40 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.

As in previous years, we wish to place on record that from our observations, in this institution the welfare of the inmates is of primary concern. The Committee wish to record our thanks and appreciation to the Governor and his staff for the excellent management and running of the institution.

During 2007, a number of positive developments were implemented and these we believe will have a better, more constructive impact on the welfare of inmates while in prison.

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. All the cells in St. Patrick's are single cells except for one cell that accommodates three inmates. The cells have in-cell sanitation.

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.

Gym

There are four separate well equipped Gymnasias in St. Patrick's. They are supervised by NCEF qualified Prison Staff and are well attended by the inmates.

Education

The school, under the stewardship of an excellent principal continues to provide a high standard of education. The new school building which opened in September 2007, provides a comfortable, learning and adaptable environment for the inmates to continue their education. A broad range of subjects are on offer in the school to the inmates from very basic literacy and numeracy skills to Arts, crafts and sculpturing to computers.

The inmates are afforded an opportunity to sit the State Examinations (Junior Cert and Leaving Cert) and 3rd Level FETAC modules. The committee are satisfied that all necessary services are available to the inmates in the school, in conjunction with one-to-one and small group tutoring. Poor concentration skills and very basic literacy and numeracy skills continue to account for the lower level of achievement and participation in the academic arena.

However, we feel that regular (twice yearly) Parent-Teacher meetings might enhance and improve participation and the personal development of the inmates. A formal opportunity for the inmates to exhibit and present their work carried out in the school could be of maximum impact and benefit to them.

Library

There are two libraries in St. Patrick's, one in the original building and one in the new school. The daily newspapers are most often sought and the board games are also popular along with the books which are available. There is a planned rota to allow all inmates (except special unit) to visit the library in groups, the 'protection' and 'non-protection' inmates go separately to prevent any conflict between the different groups. We fully support the excellent efforts of the Librarian to ensure that the library is fully accessible to all prisoners.

Workshops

Last year we acknowledged the setting up of the workshop facilities in St. Patrick's during 2006. It is very satisfying to see the progress that is on-going in the various workshops.

Metal: The metal workshop can accommodate 10 students per day. In December 2007, there were 6 inmates undergoing FETAC (further Education and Training Awards) instruction. This is a level 1 of a 6 level framework which comes under the national framework of qualifications

introduced in October 2003. There will be practical and oral examinations during and at the end of the course. Feedback to the committee from inmates is this course is very rewarding.

Woodwork: The carpentry workshop is very popular; however, there is no certificate training underway. The quality of the work is very good. The committee believe that this is a very important workshop and would encourage the immediate filling of the Assistant Industrial Supervisor post to enable more to be achieved.

Industrial Skills: The industrial skills workshop is very well attended and the skills which are taught include picture framing and weaving. There is only one weaving machine which limits the amount of instruction which can be provided. The committee would recommend that an extra machine be considered. The costs are cheap when considered against the rehabilitation benefits.

Industrial Cleaning: Industrial Cleaning is much sought after and approximately thirty-five inmates have taken up this course since the workshop opened. This training starts inmates on the road to qualifying as industrial cleaners which can provide future job opportunities.

Computer workshop: Being able to use a computer is such a basic part of modern life and the computer workshop is very beneficial for those who have taken training on them. To date six inmates have undergone and passed the ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence) and thirty-five have completed basic computer skills training. The committee welcome this progress. However, there are a number of inmates for whom using a computer is still an aspiration as their level of literacy is not sufficient to be able to undertake instruction in computers.

The committee would encourage prison management to seek out innovative solutions which may be able to achieve the dual goal of increasing general and computer literacy.

The Committee would also recommend that the workshops should undertake FETAC approved modules for example the woodwork course.

The decision of the Governor to close the recreation yards during workshop times has certainly had the desired effect of ensuring that the inmate take-up of the workshops continues to be high. The rehabilitation benefits of the workshops cannot be over-emphasised. The Governor and the staff who manage and run the workshops are to be credited and

praised for the work being done. The hope for the future lies in rehabilitation through education and training in skills which increase self-confidence and self-esteem. Inmates begin to realise that they do indeed have the basic skills to fully partake in modern society and participate in the workforce.

Special Cells / Sex-offenders

Due to the nature of their crimes and the constant threat which exists from other inmates it is necessary to keep a small number of inmates separate from the general population at all times. Whilst the Committee fully understand the need for prison management to take every effort to protect at all times, each and every prisoner in their care, we are concerned about the level of restriction this protection imposes on this small group of prisoners.

We have continued to discuss this issue with the Governor and we are looking for these prisoners to have similar education and skills development opportunities as all other prisoners. Being in prison is punishment in itself; prison life should not be further punishment. We therefore call on the Department to ensure that management are provided with sufficient extra resources to meet the rehabilitation needs (education and skills development) of these prisoners.

Visiting facilities and screens

As part of the new drive to reduce the level of contraband in prisons, St Patrick's was selected to pilot the implementation of new screens in the visiting centre. These floor-to-ceiling Perspex screens ensure that there is no contact between prisoner and visitor. Whilst this is certainly necessary and welcome, unfortunately the resulting acoustics make it extremely difficult for inmates and visitors to hear each other and has caused much discomfort for all concerned. This installation is being managed by Office of Public Works and the Visiting Committee has been very unhappy with the length of time it has taken to address fixing the problem. In the meantime, the inmates and their families continue to be affected.

A new planned Visiting System was introduced during 2007; all visits must now be pre-booked. This new system has been introduced to streamline visiting procedures and help reduce waiting times for visitors. The Visiting Committee will monitor its operation over the coming year.

There are no visits on Tuesday and Thursdays. The Visiting Committee recommends that Sunday visits be introduced to facilitate families that are unable to attend during the week.

Inmates meeting with the Committee

During 2007 inmates did not request to meet with the Visiting Committee in full session, however Visiting Committee members make contact with inmates during visits and issues and requests which were identified were brought to the attention of the Governor and attended to. The committee welcome these interactions and we are satisfied that representations which we have made on behalf of inmates are being considered and where possible and practical are being addressed by prison management.

Complaint forms

During the year the Committee inspected the complaints register forms. We noted the difficulty experienced in completing the forms due to poor writing and spelling skills. Inmates will require support and assistance in completing these forms.

Special Observation Cells

The log book which is maintained for the Special Observation cells was inspected. It is noted that there were 168 entries for the year and a high level of repeat entries relating to the same inmates. The Committee are concerned to ensure that inmates requiring medical or psychological care are getting their full care needs. This will be monitored during the coming year. While they are in the special observation cells, it is important that inmates are kept under close supervision and that all staff are fully advised of operating procedures relating to these cells.

Cleanliness throughout the prison

Whilst maintaining a clean prison can be a challenge, the committee believe that it is a vital part of the quality of life in the jail. During the year the committee have raised concern on the cleanliness of a number of the toilet facilities, which really require replacement of the toilet equipment. It is important that these items are addressed and not deferred due to the building programme in Thornton Hall.

Death and Injury

The committee are pleased to report that although the level of self-harm which occurred during the year has increased, there were no fatalities.

During 2007 there was an average of 197 inmates in custody at any one time. Up to the 15th of November there were forty-three recorded

instances of self-inflicted injuries; this is an increase on the previous two years. It is noted one inmate had 23 incidents and every measure has been taken to protect him from self-injury and to have him transferred to C.M.H. Three inmates were responsible for 33 incidents, in total 13 inmates had self-injury incidents.

The majority of self-injury incidents were superficial cuts to arms and some did require stitches. Some of the inmates who have self-injured themselves have a history of substance abuse.

Challenges for new committee members

Last year the committee highlighted the absolute lack of training, information and support which is available to committee members when they take up their place on a visiting committee. We have brought this to the attention of the Committee of Chairpersons of Irish Prison Visiting committees. There is an immediate need for the IPS to address this issue, not only for the committee for St Patrick's, but for all committees.

Visit to Midlands Prison

The committee were afforded the opportunity to visit Midlands Prison during the year. This was a very worthwhile visit and provided the committee with a perspective of prison life in a modern facility which has been purpose built to meet the needs and services of a modern prison. We would like to thank Governor O'Sullivan and the staff who facilitated the visit and shared their experience with us for their hospitality and the openness with which they shared their experiences with us.

Meeting of Chairpersons of Prison Visiting Committees

On behalf of the visiting committee in St Patrick's, the chairman attended a number of meetings of the chairpersons of all visiting committees throughout the country during the year. This has provided a very worthwhile forum to share experiences and discuss issues relating to the prisons. We welcome the role which this committee is performing and would encourage the continued support of the Department and of the Irish Prison Services to ensure that it becomes an established committee with a full mandate.

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 Quigley and to his predecessor Governor Lennon, Deputy Governor Murphy, Assistant Governor Hughes and the committee secretary Mr. Paul Flynn.

It is with sadness that we record our very sincere appreciation to Mrs. Catherine Quinn who died suddenly during 2007. Her wisdom and insight are missed on the committee and we wish to extend our very sincere sympathies to her family.

The Visiting Committee members are committed to fulfilling our function in full. We believe there is room for continuous improvement in the prison and we are looking forward to continued working in close cooperation with the Prison staff, the prisoners, the Irish Prison Services and the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Mr. Brian Lenihan, T.D.

Anthony Gavin _____(Chairperson 2007)