

St. Patrick's
Institution

Visiting Committee

Annual Report

2003

Annual Report of Visiting Committee St. Patrick's Institution, Dublin. Year ended 31st December 2003.

We the visiting committee wish to submit the following as the report of our activities for the year gone by. This 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 being run in an efficient, fair, safe and humanitarian way and are pleased to confirm that this has always being the case. We wish to place on record the fact that in this Institution the welfare of the prisoners is of primary concern and wish to record our thanks and appreciation to the Governor and his staff for their excellent management and running of the institution.

It is with sadness that we report that an inmate died in custody and we the committee wish to extend our deepest sympathies to his family on this sad event.

We will address our activities and concerns under the following headings.

Food:

This committee wishes to place on record that we have received no complaints regarding food in this year or for that matter in the

last number of years. Food is prepared in a very efficient manner by a very professional staff and members of the prison population are also employed in the kitchen. The kitchen continues to perform well in its annual Cert Audits and we wish to place our congratulations on the record. We feel that food is appropriate, well varied and of a high quality and we also feel that waste is kept to a minimum.

Accommodation

Cells: No Complaints have been received from prisoners regarding their cells which all have a self-contained toilet. Prisoners have not complained of overcrowding and on our visits we have yet to note it or have it brought to our attention.

Each cell is also equipped for television and each prisoner has access to a television set for their cell. This is very important, as it is part of the prisons integrated approach to help prevent and reduce suicide and attempted suicide. It also helps to relieve boredom during the long hours of confinement and over the years has reduced greatly the attempts at suicide. A dedicated television channel especially showing literacy type programmes is continually available on the television, which allows the inmates to study the basics of literacy in the privacy of their cell away from the gaze of their peers, and we fully endorse this action.

Workshops: This committee believes this accommodation to be very poor and request the immediate provision of proper workshops as the number one priority of this year. A severe problem exists due to the lack of adequate training facilities in both

metal work and woodwork and we feel this prevents proper preparation for release and rehabilitation of our inmates.

Medical: There is a full time doctor assigned to St Patrick's and a psychiatrist visits weekly. No complaints have been received and we feel the service is adequate. No dental facility exists but it is provided in Mountjoy and is considered adequate for the demand.

Recreation:

GYM: A well-equipped gym exists and is run by a very professional dedicated and interested staff. We are pleased to report that a large number of high profile sports people continue to visit the prison to share their time and experience with the prisoners. We thank them for this.

Yard: A number of complaints have been received and investigated by this committee regarding sanctions imposed on prisoners following alleged transgressions in the various yards. In all cases the committee has upheld the decision of the governor as being correct. The main transgressions have related to drugs being thrown over the wall from outside the prison and the prisoners attempting to retrieve them.

We are pleased to report that the netting, which was erected over the exercise yards, continues to be a success in the prevention of large-scale arrival of drugs to the prison. It was a recommendation of this committee that the netting be erected.

Use of Footballs is restricted in the yards to certain nominated days to allow all prisoners whether playing football or not to have access to the yard. A number of complaints were received from

prisoners but on balance we as a committee feel this action to be appropriate.

Education:

We the committee of St Patrick's Institution place education as our number one priority in our attempts to assist the inmates at this prison have a normal start on the outside after their sentence is completed. We feel we are very lucky with the staff attached to this particular programme and feel that our school is an excellent facility however it is just adequate for its purpose. We feel that we are limited by the availability of teachers from Dublin VEC. However those we have are very good. A number of our prisoners continue to study for the State Certificate Examinations and sit them in the prison each June. We were again very proud of their results.

Basic literacy continues to be a problem at St Patrick's and a substantial number of the inmates are unable to read or write and sadly their language skills are also very poor as their ability to even construct oral sentences is limited. This issue is addressed by the literacy team of the prison and also by the various volunteers who attend the prison. We must record our appreciation to the volunteers who come in on a regular basis to assist the inmates with literacy and classes are held each evening. We again wish to highlight the innovative action being taken to address the issue through the televisions in prisoners cells as previously outlined.

Library:

Library is well stocked and is well used by the prisoners often as many as 30 inmates using the facility on any one occasion.

Visits: A liberal approach on the number of visits prisoners receive at this prison exists which we fully support we feel the management is right to afford a second visit to parents etc.

Recreation Activities:

Members of the prison population are involved in various recreational activities and many groups from outside the prison come to compete against the prisoners in a variety of activities from chess to football. We are especially proud of our chess team who regularly beat the cream of Dublin and Leinster in chess. All these activities are recognised as being important in the life of the prison by this committee and we fully support these activities.

D Division: The Drug Free Wing, of St. Patrick's continues to be a success with a number of prisoners waiting to be accommodated on the wing. We fully endorse the programme and are pleased that it is so successful.

Gaisce Awards:

We as a committee are proud to report that a number of our inmates received the Presidents Award the Bronze Gaisce Medal at a special ceremony in the prison in November. This highlights again the opportunities that exist for young people in St Patrick's.

Judges Visit: On the invitation of a member of the visiting committee Justice Conal Gibbons paid a visit to St. Patrick's Institution to see first hand the realities of Prison for young offenders and he was very impressed by what he saw. We would welcome further visits from members of the Judiciary.

Issues of Concern:

Closure of Open Prisons and Fort Mitchel: We as a visiting committee are concerned by the proposals to close these prisons as we feel that St. Patrick's will be unable to transfer prisoners to other often more suitable locations. We also feel that overcrowding at this location may become a reality as we are operating almost at capacity for the past year the absence of other similar prisons will increase the demands on St. Patrick's.

Connect Programme The committee is very concerned regarding the connect programme which is now unlikely to occur in St. Patrick's. We feel this programme is very important especially in light of the profile of our inmates. In this regard we now request that the programme be immediately commenced in St Patrick's.

Security of Prison: We as a committee are unhappy with the presence of overgrown shrubbery on the canal bank adjacent to the prison. The issue has been raised with the O.P.W and Waterways and we await their attention to the matter. The presence of this growth enables people to through items over the wall with out detection by our CCTV system.

Assaults on Prisoners: A small number of alleged assaults were reported as having occurred in the prison amongst prisoners. Allegations were also made against staff. An internal investigation was held into each case. An Garda Siochana investigated all

reports and found the allegations against Prison Officers to be unfounded.

New Unit within St. Patrick's: This committee is not sure what is happening in this regard. We would however point out that we do not believe it has adequate space to deal with its expected demand.

Reporting of Drugs Seizures: This committee recommends that each time drugs are seized in the prison Gardai are alerted and people concerned dealt with by An Garda Siochana.

Discipline: For serious / gross misconduct by inmates should be reviewed by the Department and more appropriate sanctions should be available to the Governor.

Conclusion

We are pleased to submit this report and feel St. Patrick's is well run by a very professional Governor and Staff. Facilities are in need of some improvement but basic accommodation is good for what is a very old prison. Prison always looks clean and a good work ethic is being instilled in the population.

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Mr. Hugh Lynn	<u>Hugh Lynn</u>	Chairperson
Mr. Colm O'Donnell	<u>Colm O'Donnell</u>	Vice Chairman
Ms. Mary Murphy	<u>Mary Murphy</u>	Committee Member
Ms. Mary O'Regan	<u>Mary O'Regan</u>	Committee Member
Mr. Michael Burns	<u>Michael Burns</u>	Committee Member
Mr. Noel Cloake	<u>Noel Cloake P.C.</u>	Committee Member
Mr. Victor Fisher	<u>Victor Fisher</u>	Committee Member
Mr. Hugh Connaghan	<u>Hugh Connaghan</u>	Committee Member
Mr. James Ladden	<u>James Ladden</u>	Committee Member
Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan	<u>Patrick O'Sullivan</u>	Committee Member