

Ms Frances FitzGerald, TD
Minister for Justice & Equality
94 St Stephens Green,
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Visiting Committee Annual Report 2016

We, the members of the Visiting Committee at Portlaoise Prison are pleased to present our Annual Report for the year ending 31st December, 2016

The Committee met on the first Tuesday of each month throughout the year and two members of the Committee visited the Prison once a month. Each month members of the Committee visited different areas of the Prison and inspected all the facilities and services which are available to the prisoners.

The Committee met with some prisoners from both C Block and A Block throughout the year who had various requests and issues which they wished to raise with the Visiting Committee. The Committee brought these issues and requests to the attention of the Governor along with their recommendations and were satisfied with the decision or action taken on each occasion. .

Throughout the year, the Committee visited the E Block, C Block and A Block on many occasions and are delighted to report that the C Block is a very modern building with in cell sanitation which provides a wide range of workshops and education facilities for offenders housed in this Block.

However, E Block is in a very poor state of repair with many areas needing urgent attention.

The A Block is a relatively modern building with in cell sanitation. However, there is no natural air flow in the building and it can be very warm and with the absence of air flow can be very unhealthy for both staff and prisoners in this building.

The Committee note the lack of appropriate services that are available to prisoners in the A Block and feel that much more should be done to assist prisoners housed in this area to rehabilitate and prepare them for their eventual release back into society.

The committee are happy to report that new Work Training Officers have been assigned to Portlaoise Prison with a view to opening more workshops and offering training for prisoners.

We are happy to report that all prisoners have access to a very good health care system which includes a full time Medical Officer, who along with the Nurse Officers provide excellent care for all the prisoners. A Psychologist attends at the Prison on a regular basis. The following clinics are also provided on a regular basis or as required i.e. Psychiatrist, Dentist, Chiropodist and Optician.

The spiritual needs of the prisoners are adequately cared for by the Chaplain and other visiting chaplains.

The Prison also has a full time Probation Officer who addresses a wide range of issues with the prisoners such as offending behaviour, anger management, addiction, coping skills, problem solving skills and resettlement issues. Most of the work is carried out on an individual basis but some group work programmes also took place during the year. Some prisoners also requested help with sourcing accommodation, social welfare and employment in preparation for their release throughout the year.

The Education Centre offers prisoners a wide range of subjects at basic, intermediate and advanced levels. The Education Centre held a number of examinations by accredited bodies during the year and a number of prisoners sat these exams. A number of pre release courses were also offered during the year and include courses in Goal Setting, Personal Development, Relationships and Job preparation.

Visiting speakers from the following agencies also visited and gave great assistance and were very informative and beneficial to the Pre Release Programme.

- Citizens Information Centre
- Linkage (Employment issues)
- Solas
- Pathways
- Pace
- Addiction Centre

The following courses were also completed to aid prisoners with their needs and requirements for employment on release from Prison.

- Environmental Food Hygiene (Leonardo)
- City & Guilds, Skills Foundation, Skills Proficiency
- Pre Release Programme
- European Computer Driving License (ECDL)
- Web Design
- First Aid / CPR/ Order of Malta
- Addiction Studies

The Education Centre had an average enrolment of between 250 and 260 prisoners throughout the year.

The Education Centre holds examinations accredited by the following bodies :

Junior Certificate
Leaving Certificate
FETAC Level 3
FETAC Level 4
FETAC Level 5
Open University/Distance Learning
Trinity Guildhall
Scrudu Ceol Tire Comhaltas
Royal Irish Academy of Music
Rockschool

The Education Programme, projects and extra curricular activities is continuously evolving and developing and a large number of extra educational projects and activities were developed and encouraged by teachers in the Prison during the year including Poetry & Creative Writing workshops, Music & Song Writing, Motivational Workshop, Craft Workshop, First Aid and Philosophy Workshop.

The Industrial Supervisor in charge of the Kitchen and his team of several Assistant Industrial Supervisors continue to produce and maintain very high standards in preparing, cooking and distribution of food on a daily basis. The 28 day menu caters for both normal and vegetarian diet.

Prisoners working in this area must take part in a number of certifiable training courses which assists them in the performance of their work and helps them maintain an interest in their work.

Once again, we congratulate the Governor and his staff in this area on their many achievements during the year.

The Committee were very saddened to hear of the untimely and sudden death of the Inspector of Prisons Judge Michael O'Reilly and wish to extend their sincere condolences to his wife and family and also his colleagues at the Office of the Inspector of Prisons.

In conclusion, we would like to thank Governors Mullen and Robbins, their management team and staff for the courtesy, assistance and hospitality provided to us on our visits to the Prison at all times during the year.

Anne Turley
Chairperson

Declan Brennan

Martin Moroney