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HMP ISLE OF WIGHT – INCONSISTENT PROGRESS

Since the amalgamation of the three Isle of Wight prisons into one, there has been some progress but it has been inconsistent, said Nick Hardwick, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the report of an announced inspection.

In 2009, the Prison Service clustered the three Isle of Wight prisons – Parkhurst, Albany and Camp Hill - under a single governor. Each site is a significant challenge in its own right and each has been criticised by the Inspectorate previously. Amalgamating three disparate prisons was fraught with risk, not least that managers would be distracted by the upheaval from delivering the improvements that have frequently been called for.

Inspectors were pleased to find that:

- prisoners reported improvements in safety at Parkhurst and Albany and to both had taken steps to reduce their disproportionate use of segregation;
- suicide and self-harm prevention issues were generally well managed;
- there had been considerable management efforts to improve staff-prisoner relationships, with notable success at Parkhurst; and
- mental health services were good.

However, inspectors had some concerns:

- safety had deteriorated at Camp Hill, where illegal drugs appeared endemic and, in consequence, too many prisoners sought sanctuary in the segregation unit;
- use of force remained high, and there were a number of examples of inappropriate use of special accommodation;
- Albany's poorly functioning automatic night sanitation arrangements remained unacceptable and degrading;
- the management of diversity issues varied markedly, as did the quality of personal officer schemes;
- a quarter of prisoners were locked in their cells during the core day at Camp Hill, despite its avowed training role and the quality of learning and skills there was inadequate; and
- overall, there was not enough education, training and work to keep prisoners purposefully occupied, too many prisoners were unemployed and not enough focus was placed on vocational qualifications; and
- resettlement and offender management remained underdeveloped across the prison, despite some excellent offending behaviour programmes, especially at Albany.

Nick Hardwick said:

“HMP Isle of Wight is, in many ways, the sum of its three disparate parts: Parkhurst, Albany and Camp Hill prisons. However, the single senior management team has worked hard to combat the many frailties and unique – and sometimes negative – culture of the three sites and has had some success. Thus Parkhurst, the subject of coruscating previous criticism from the Inspectorate, has demonstrated considerable improvements in terms of safety and decency. There has also been some improvement at Albany. By contrast, Camp Hill appears to have slipped off the management's radar and has

deteriorated significantly in terms of both safety and its core training function.

“This inconsistent progress exemplifies the challenges facing HMP Isle of Wight: it is now a huge prison, with a large number of inherited weaknesses. Some of these have been addressed but many more remain. Moreover, the prison’s governor has recently resigned. This has left an enormous prison with a huge, unfinished agenda for change facing a difficult economic future under new leadership. The National Offender Management Service will need to ensure that HMP Isle of Wight is well supported if the progress we found, albeit inconsistent, is to be sustained and the many remaining issues addressed.”

Michael Spurr, Chief Executive Officer of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), said:

"I am pleased that the Chief Inspector has recognised the progress made at HMP Isle of Wight, especially at Parkhurst. Despite the organisational challenges faced in running a large prison, considerable improvements have been made especially in safety and staff-prisoner relationships.

"Isle of Wight has been through a radical programme of change recently to amalgamate three prisons and this report suggests the prison is heading in the right direction.

"The acting Governor and his staff will continue to address the recommendations in the report and will build on the progress already made."

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

1. A copy of the report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 23 March 2011 at www.justice.gov.uk/inspectors/hmi-prisons

2. HM Inspectorate of Prisons is an independent inspectorate, inspecting places of detention to report on conditions and treatment, and promote positive outcomes for those detained and the public.
3. This announced inspection was carried out from 4-15 October 2010.
4. HMP Isle of Wight is a category B male training prison. Parkhurst holds category B prisoners and a small number of unconvicted adult male prisoners awaiting trial. Albany holds category B prisoners, mainly sex offenders. Camp Hill holds category C prisoners.
5. Please contact Jane Parsons in HMI Prisons Press Office on 0207 035 2123 or 07880 787452 from 0915 to 1415 Monday to Friday if you would like more information or to request an interview with Nick Hardwick.