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HMP THE VERNE – SAFE, SECURE AND PURPOSEFUL

HMP The Verne continued to achieve a great deal despite the limitations of its environment, said Nick Hardwick, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the report of an unannounced inspection of the Dorset training prison.

The Verne is housed in a nineteenth century “citadel” in Portland. The prison’s historic location limits its role and regime and has meant that only lower risk prisoners can be held there, many of whom might otherwise be in open conditions. As a consequence, it holds many foreign nationals. This inspection found that The Verne continued to be a safe and well-run prison.

Inspectors were pleased to find that:

- there was little bullying or violence, little evidence of substance misuse and security was generally proportionate;
- staff-prisoner interaction was good;
- arrangements for the large number of foreign nationals were well developed, with good access to UK Border Agency staff;
- prisoners had plenty of time out of cell;
- there were sufficient work, education and training places for the population, and access to activity places was now better managed;
and

- the strategic management of resettlement had improved, while provision along most resettlement pathways was adequate and public protection issues were well managed.

However, inspectors had some concerns:

- although arrangements to prevent self-harm were reasonable, better monitoring was required of action plans following deaths in custody investigations;
- professional interpreting services were not used during early days in custody and there was a need for more translated materials on general subjects; and
- there was still a significant backlog of offender assessments and the prison struggled to get involvement from offender managers in the community.

Nick Hardwick said:

"The Verne remained reasonably safe, secure and purposeful, despite the limitations of its physical fabric. The specific needs of the prisoner population, including the large number of foreign nationals, were generally well catered for. Good efforts were made to effectively support resettlement, whether to the United Kingdom or abroad.

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

"I am pleased that the Chief Inspector found that The Verne continues to perform well and is a safe prison with good purposeful activity, education and training places and positive staff-prisoner relationships.

"I also note the improvements to resettlement work, which helps to reduce re-offending and protect the public."

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

1. A copy of the report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 21 April 2011 at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/inspectorate-reports/hmi-prisons/prison-and-yoi-inspections>.
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 unannounced short follow-up inspection was carried out from 24-26 August 2010.
4. HMP The Verne is a category C training prison for adult males.
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.