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HMP SWINFEN HALL: AN IMPRESSIVE PRISON

HMP Swinfen Hall had been able to improve its performance in spite of many challenges, and was once again an impressive prison, said the Chief Inspector of Prisons, Anne Owers, publishing the report of a short unannounced inspection of the Staffordshire prison.

At the last inspection, there was concern about the lack of sufficient purposeful activity for an expanded population of 18 to 25 year olds, many serving lengthy sentences. This inspection found that activity had improved, and the prison had managed to retain its other strengths, and overcome the challenges.

Inspectors found:

- Swinfen Hall was largely a safe prison, with good suicide prevention arrangements and without a significant drugs problem. However, there had been an increase in violence, hostage-taking and the consequent use of force by staff – mainly due to a rapid influx of prisoners with indeterminate sentences for public protection, frustrated by the lack of planning and resources to progress them through the system. These tensions appeared, however, to be subsiding.
- Staff-prisoner relations were very good, with a sound personal officer scheme. While race issues were well-managed, foreign national work was under-developed. Accommodation was mixed.
- Time out of cell remained adequate and almost all prisoners were now usefully occupied. There was good access to learning and skills opportunities, although some were menial.
- There was good strategic focus on resettlement, but implementation of offender management had been patchy. The model that had been introduced had not worked well and was being changed.

Anne Owers said:

“Swinfen Hall had seen the doubling of its population, some turbulence arising from the rapid influx of large numbers of prisoners serving indeterminate sentences of public protection and the need to integrate different age ranges effectively. Nevertheless, it had been able to sustain the generally safe and respectful atmosphere, focused on resettlement, that we have previously applauded. It had also addressed the deficits we identified on our last visit in the provision of purposeful activity. It is, once again, a very impressive prison. “

Phil Wheatley, Director General of the National Offender Management Service, said:

“This is an excellent report and the Governor and staff should be proud of their work. The Chief Inspector has made clear that Swinfen Hall has faced significant challenges and has managed to overcome them.

“Swinfen Hall’s achievements mean that the public are better protected. Constructive relations with prisoners, good purposeful activity and a focus on resettlement reduce the chances of re-offending.”

Note to Editors:

1. Anne Owers is available for media interviews. Please call 0203 334 3525 to arrange an interview.
2. The unannounced follow-up inspection took place on 15-17 April 2008.
3. HMP and YOI Swinfen Hall has an operational capacity of 620 as of September 2005.