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HMP DORCHESTER: WELL-RUN PRISON WITH INSUFFICIENT ACTIVITY

Good management and excellent staff-prisoner relationships at HMP Dorchester mitigated some of the weaknesses of a local prison with too little activity, said Dame Anne Owers, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the report of an announced inspection into the Dorset prison.

Dorchester is a small, Victorian local prison built around 1880. It houses a wide range of prisoners in overcrowded conditions, and was undergoing major refurbishment work. Despite these challenges, it was a commendably safe prison, with a sound focus on resettlement.

Inspectors found:

- There were good arrangements to support prisoners' safety.
- Most accommodation was adequate, although it was unacceptable that some small single cells were occupied by two prisoners.
- Staff-prisoner relationships were among the best seen recently, though there was not yet a fully functioning personal officer scheme.
- There was too little time out of cell. Access to daytime association and exercise was good, but there was little evening association.
- There was insufficient education, training and work to meet the needs of the population, but the quality of education and PE was good.
- Work across most of the resettlement pathways was satisfactory, but there was little custody planning for those with short sentences.

Anne Owers said:

“In many ways, Dorchester demonstrated that good management and excellent staff-prisoner relationships can mitigate some of the weaknesses inherent in a small, elderly and overcrowded local prison, which at the time of the inspection had also been turned into a building site. Like all local prisons, Dorchester receives a wide array of prisoners with an equally wide range of needs, yet they were generally kept safe, treated decently and had attention paid to their resettlement needs. There was still too little purposeful activity, but, overall, managers and staff deserve considerable credit for what they have achieved.”

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

“This is a good report that rightly recognises the excellent work going on at Dorchester. The prison’s senior management and staff are to be commended for their hard work and commitment, creating a safe and effective regime and contributing towards prisoners’ resettlement back into the community, thereby reducing re-offending and protecting the public.”

Notes for Editors

1. The full report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 28 August 2009 at <http://inspectors.justice.gov.uk/hmiprison>
2. The announced inspection of the HMP Dorchester was carried out from 30 March – 3 April 2009.
3. The operational capacity at HMP Dorchester at the time of the inspection was 259.
4. The last inspection of HMP Dorchester took place from 2 – 5 April 2005.
5. Anne Owers, Chief Inspector, is available for interview. If you would like to speak to her please contact Andrew Winstone in the Press Office on 0203 334 3530.