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HMP CANTERBURY – GOOD START, BUT LITTLE SUPPORT

HMP Canterbury, the first prison to hold only foreign nationals, had made impressive efforts to fulfil its new role, but with little support from national agencies, said Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the report of an announced inspection.

Inspectors found that the prison provided a safe and respectful environment for prisoners from a variety of countries, cultures and languages. Standards of care for those at risk of suicide were high, and staff-prisoner relationships were good, though staff needed more cultural awareness training. Staff took considerable trouble to try to meet prisoners' concerns, including hunting down missing property before removal.

Prisoners were out of their cells for most of the day, and had access to work or education. Some very effective work was being done under the facilitated returns scheme, under which 150 prisoners had returned home in 2007

The inspection also identified some weaknesses

- Liaison and communication with the Border and Immigration Agency. Deportation decisions were made or communicated late, causing considerable anxiety to prisoners and undermining resettlement planning.
- No guidance or support had been provided on appropriate resettlement provision for prisoners not subject to the facilitated returns scheme
- The quality of work was poor, and education did not meet prisoners' needs.

Anne Owers said:

“Managers and staff at Canterbury had made some impressive efforts to fulfil their new, and initially unique, role of holding foreign national prisoners. Insofar as they could do, they were providing a safe and decent environment for men who were facing considerable uncertainty and anxiety.

“What was far less impressive was the very limited support available from the national agencies with overall responsibility. The involvement of the BIA was belatedly improving, but remained limited. The Prison Service, lacking any national strategies or guidance for the care of foreign national prisoners, had been able to offer little support. Fortunately, managers were able to make use of the analysis and recommendations of the Inspectorate’s foreign nationals thematic.

“The absence of clear standards and guidance for the care of foreign nationals is a weakness that is evident throughout the prison system, and one which needs to be addressed nationally”.

Phil Wheatley, Prison Service Director General said:

“ I am pleased that the Chief Inspector has recognised the excellent work by staff at Canterbury who are dealing with a particularly vulnerable group of prisoners whose needs are complex and who present very specific challenges.

“There are now five Border and Immigration Agency staff in the prison offering evening surgeries for every wing and there is a specific BIA input into the induction process.

“A cultural awareness booklet has been produced for staff and the prison is working in partnership with the International Organisation for Migration to put together resettlement plans for prisoners.”

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. A full copy of the HMCIP report into HMP Canterbury is available from <http://inspectrates.justice.gov.uk/hmiprisons/>
2. The announced inspection took place between 20-24 August 2007.
3. Anne Owers has limited time available for media interviews. Please call 0207 210 0675 to arrange an interview.

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