

HMP BRONZEFIELD – LESSONS LEARNED, PROGRESS MADE

HMP Bronzefield, England's first private prison for women, had learnt from some early mistakes, and was making good progress, said Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the prison's first inspection report today.

Like other women's prisons, Bronzefield dealt with a very needy and demanding population. Every month on average, 60 suicide prevention forms were opened and there were 50 self-harm incidents, half of all new prisoners needed detoxification, seven of the 17 inpatients in healthcare were awaiting transfer to secure NHS mental hospitals and many more needed primary mental healthcare.

Inspectors found that Bronzefield had undergone a steep learning curve since its opening 12 months earlier. Lessons had been learnt from false starts in detoxification and healthcare, and managers had to some extent stabilised the staff group, who had initially not been prepared for the level of need. However, mental health provision remained inadequate.

Inspectors commended the physical environment, and relationships between staff and prisoners, which were very good: though the inexperience of staff sometimes meant that they were unable to sort out prisoners' queries.

The provision of activity was particularly commended. Prisoners were out of cell for lengthy periods, and also able to participate in activities linked to resettlement needs and workshops that delivered employment skills.

Resettlement was a key focus, though more work was needed to identify needs and track progress. There was insufficient drug treatment work, even though this was likely to be at the heart of most women's resettlement needs. Similarly, the needs of foreign nationals – 40% of the population – were not being met.

Anne Owers said:

“Overall, this is a positive report on a prison that has undergone a steep learning curve in a short time. We were impressed with the enthusiasm of managers and staff and their readiness to learn from experience. “

“The crucial task for managers will be to ensure that the relatively inexperienced staff team are supported, so as to minimise the staff turnover that can easily destabilise a fairly new prison; and we have pointed to other areas that need to be built on if the prison is to sustain and improve on its early progress.”

Sarah Payne, Regional Offender Manager for the South East, said:

“I am pleased that the Chief Inspector has recognised that Bronzefield Prison has made good progress over the last twelve months, especially in providing offenders with meaningful work and training opportunities, a key priority for the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).

“The prison is also working hard to improve healthcare provision, particularly in the field of mental health, in partnership with the local Primary Care Trust.

“I am confident the senior management team at Bronzefield will continue to improve standards at the prison, to ensure all the women in their care are able to live in a safe and decent environment.”

Notes to editors

1. The unannounced inspection of HMP Bronzefield took place between 13 and 17 June 2005.
2. HMP Bronzefield is a women’s prison which opened in June 2004. It is privately run by UK Detention Services.
3. Inspectorate reports and releases are available at <http://inspectors.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprisons>.
4. For an electronic copy of the report, please call 020 7035 3852.
5. Anne Owers is available for pre-recorded interviews on 28 November in the afternoon and for live interviews on the morning of 29 November. To request an interview, please telephone 020 7035 3852.