

HMP Altcourse - Local Prison's Work Highly Commended

HMP Altcourse is a very good local prison, providing meaningful activity for most of its prisoners, according to an inspection report published today by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons Anne Owers.

The prison's strengths included:

- An extremely good environment and staff-prisoner relationships;
- Prisoners were out of their cells for long periods, and were actively encouraged to engage in work and education;
- High quality resettlement services to identify and try to meet prisoners' needs;
- Active involvement of residential staff in looking after mentally ill prisoners; and
- A multi-disciplinary approach to detoxification.

There were areas for improvement:

- Relatively high claims of prisoner-on-prisoner victimisation and assault levels indicated a need to improve anti-bullying procedures;
- First night procedures needed to be strengthened;
- More vocational qualifications should be provided;
- Links with outside agencies needed to be established; and
- There were weaknesses in race relations and foreign nationals work.

The prison's success was attributed to a 'whole prison' approach, with visible and strong management and a committed and involved staff group.

Anne Owers said:

"Managers and staff responded very positively to our findings, and were committed to making improvements. Altcourse's holistic approach to prison management needs to be sustained. It offers a model from which all prisons could learn a great deal.

Trevor Williams, Assistant Director for Contracted Prisons, said:

"I am delighted that the Chief Inspector recognises that Altcourse continues to be a very good local prison that fulfils its core functions safely and effectively.

"Altcourse provides an excellent example of how contracted prisons can play an important part of the criminal justice system and enable us to raise standards of delivery, increase capacity and introduce dynamic management practices into the prison system.

"The staff and management at the prison should be very proud of their achievements and the standards they have set. I am very confident that they will be able to maintain these high standards and that they will continue to act as a positive example to other prisons around the country."

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. The unannounced inspection of HMP Highpoint took place on 7 - 8 December 2004.
2. HMP Highpoint is a large Category C prison for men in Suffolk.
3. Inspectorate reports and releases are available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/justice/prisons/inspprisons>.
4. For an electronic copy of the report, please call 020 7035 4381.