

HMP Ashwell has a number of weaknesses and staff need greater clarity about the role and direction of the prison, according to the Chief Inspector of Prisons Anne Owers, in the report of an announced inspection published today.

The inspection found:

- Some prisoners felt vulnerable, and safer custody procedures needed to be brought up to the standard of most training prisons.
- Management of race relations was inadequate, despite ethnic minority prisoners making up nearly a quarter of the population.
- For a training prison, too much prisoner activity at Ashwell lacked purpose and the quality of some work, training and education was disappointing.

Nonetheless, the problems were not insurmountable. Despite the perceptions of vulnerability amongst some prisoners, Ashwell offered a generally safe environment. Resettlement provision was good, with effective sentence planning, sound programmes to address substance use and offending behaviour, and a range of positive work to reintegrate prisoners into society.

Anne Owers said:

"Ashwell is at something of a crossroads. Although our inspection exposed a number of weaknesses, most of these could be remedied simply by vigorous management attention and a clear sense of strategic direction."

" There is good work to build on, and with these changes Ashwell could move towards becoming a high performing training prison."

Phil Wheatley, Director General of the Prison Service, said:

"I am pleased that the Chief Inspector recognised the quality of resettlement work at Ashwell. Good resettlement work is central to the work of a training prison of this type, and the governor and staff are working hard to try to support this with more consistent delivery of work and education."

"The Governor and Area Manager will work closely to an Action plan based on the Chief Inspector's recommendations to ensure that weaknesses are tackled and strengths built on."

Notes to editors:

1. The announced inspection of HMP Ashwell took place on 15 - 19 November 2004.
2. HMP Ashwell is a category C training prison with a semi-open regime for adult male prisoners.
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.