

HMP Canterbury is a safe prison, but there are serious doubts that it can fulfil its purpose as a training prison within the constraints of a restricted inner city site and without major investment, according to the Chief Inspector of Prisons Anne Owers, in the report of an announced inspection published today.

The inspection found:

- A safe prison with a well controlled, relaxed environment;
- Good procedures to prevent self harm (incidence of which was low);
- Good faith and healthcare provision.

But the report noted concerns that HMP Canterbury, after a change of role in 2003 from a local prison, was struggling to fulfil its new function as a training prison for longer-term prisoners:

- There was a severe shortage of purposeful activity and under-developed resettlement work for prisoners;
- 40% of prisoners had no activity and spent at least 19 hours each day locked in their cells;
- Accommodation was old, in poor condition and overcrowded;
- Prisoners had to share small cells with unscreened toilets.

Anne Owers said:

"There is much to commend at Canterbury. It is a safe, well-controlled establishment with relatively low levels of bullying and self-harm and good healthcare and faith provision. The governor is committed and energetic.

"But, while there is satisfactory provision for some, a severe lack of purposeful activity for all prisoners means that it is not fulfilling its role as a training prison adequately. Too many prisoners spend too long locked up. What association time they do have is of insufficient quality, although physical education staff at Canterbury deserve credit for achieving much with few resources.

"It is questionable how well a fully effective, purposeful regime can be delivered within the limitations of the site, but without major investment, Canterbury's training and resettlement functions will remain poor."

Michael Spurr, Director of Operations of the Prison Service, said:

"I am pleased that the Chief Inspector recognised the safety of the regime at Canterbury, and the relatively low levels of bullying and self-harm.

"Any re-role is a significant upheaval for a prison and the physical limitations of the site present a substantial challenge. However, Canterbury is adapting well to its new role. The regime is being developed, and a building programme is under way which will improve employment and training provision for prisoners. The governor is providing very effective leadership and staff are responding positively to the challenge."

Notes to editors:

1. The announced inspection of HMP Canterbury took place on 13 - 17 September 2004.
2. HMP Canterbury is a Category C Training Prison for men serving less than four years. The prison lies close to the centre of Canterbury and dates from 1802. Originally it was a 'County Gaol' serving local courts. The prison changed its role from a local to a Category C on 30 March 2003.
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.