

HMP Hollesley Bay is beginning to rise to the challenge of changes to its population and role, HMI Chief Inspector of Prisons Anne Owers said today.

The Suffolk open prison, as well as losing its large farm, is dealing with increasing numbers of prisoners who would not previously have been considered suitable for open conditions.

Anne Owers said:

“The governor and his staff have begun to rise to these and other challenges, but this inspection illustrated that continued progress is required to ensure Hollesley Bay forges a strong new identity for itself as a modern open prison effectively resettling its prisoners.”

The inspectors found the prison was generally safe and was adjusting to the increased diversity of its prisoners with good procedures for reception and induction procedures, suicide and self-harm and anti-bullying.

But the report also found areas of concern. A particular weakness was the fact that the security department was shared with the adjacent juvenile establishment, Warren Hill. This made it more difficult to develop appropriate security measures for the more challenging population now being received – for example in identifying subtle forms of bullying, better training for night patrols and improved searching and drug testing facilities.

Anne Owers said:

“There were some excellent examples of individual and respectful care being shown to prisoners by staff at Hollesley Bay, particularly in reception and education, and this engendered respect in return.

“However, inspectors were concerned that some staff on the residential units were too distant and failed to interact in the way that should be expected in a category D establishment.

“This variation was also reflected in some of the systems that we expect to see in an appropriately respectful regime.

“Religious provision was good, but legal services were almost non-existent; race relations work required enhancement and attention to

the needs of foreign nationals was virtually non-existent; healthcare was very good but food was vociferously criticised by prisoners. This mixed picture suggests an establishment at a cross-roads."

A wide variety of work placements and skills training were in place and education was generally of high quality. There were important developments in resettlement, including: increasing the number of paid work opportunities, accommodation, employment and benefits advice, good drug counselling, assessment, advice and throughcare services.

Anne Owers concluded:

"Resettlement had progressed well, under strong management and based upon an analysis of prisoners' needs. Still more could be done, in sentence planning, especially for life sentenced prisoners, but overall resettlement was progressing well and should become a core function of the establishment.

"We found Hollesley Bay to be a prison facing up to a number of serious challenges. Its unique history and local situation required a new sense of direction, with an increased focus on resettlement, as well as the need to deal with more demanding prisoners. There was still clearly much to do, but the governor and his staff had begun to rise to the task."

Commenting on the report, Phil Wheatley, Director General of the Prison Service said:

"I am pleased that the Chief Inspector has acknowledged that the governor and his staff are rising to the difficult challenges that a change of population and role has brought for Hollesley Bay. I am especially pleased that Hollesley Bay has been praised for its progressing work in important areas such as reception, induction, resettlement and healthcare. Improvements are already being made in areas that were criticised, and they will be the focus of determined action to ensure Hollesley Bay becomes a high performing establishment."

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. This announced inspection took place between 8 to 12 December

2003. Its last inspection was 1999 (as a lone establishment with Warren Hill). Hollesley Bay is a Category D open prison, which holds 307 prisoners. It has the largest prison farm, extending to more than 1,500 acres and a stud of Suffolk Punch horses, which are an endangered breed.

2. Inspectorate reports and releases are available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/justice/prisons/inspprisons>

3. For an electronic copy of the report, please email simon.steel@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk