

## **HMP YOI STOKE HEATH - WEAKNESSES IN SAFETY AND DEFICITS FOR YOUNG ADULTS**

There were concerns about safety procedures and the inadequacy of provision for young adults at Stoke Heath YOI, said Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing a report of an announced inspection of the establishment.

The inspection revealed weaknesses in the management of suicide and self-harm, anti-bullying and child protection procedures. Some special cells were unfit for purpose, and children and young adults were routinely held in special and unfurnished cells for lengthy periods: averaging more than six hours for children and twelve hours for young adults. Staff needed more support to assist them in caring for some very damaged children and young people.

Inspectors were also concerned about the deficits in provision for young adults. More funding and staffing were available for juveniles, who felt safer, had greater educational and training opportunities, and were managed through sentence. By contrast, more than half of young adults were locked in their cells at any time, and the quantity and quality of education was unsatisfactory. More than a quarter of young adults reported victimisation by staff, and this was higher among black and minority ethnic young people.

The report also expressed concern about visiting arrangements, often for families travelling long distances, and who faced long waits, with no proper visitors' centre. Moreover, if there was suspicion of drugs importation, young prisoners could be denied physical contact with any visitor for a period of up to six months.

However, the report commends good practice in reception, advocacy and reintegration and commends the establishment for rising to the challenge of providing good quality education and training for juveniles.

Anne Owers said:

"Some of Stoke Heath's problems require action by the establishment and those responsible for monitoring and supporting it. However, others stem from systemic failings: the under-resourcing of provision for young adults and the over-representation of vulnerable and mentally disturbed young people in our prisons.

"This inspection and others point to the need for the National Offender Management Service to develop and implement specific standards for young adults. This targeted approach has succeeded in improving conditions and treatment of children and women. A similar focus on the specific needs of young adults is necessary, not only for them but also to protect the public from the likelihood of their reoffending".

Phil Wheatley, Director General of the Prison Service said:

"I am pleased that the Chief Inspector recognised the quality of some aspects of the regime at Stoke Heath, including education and training provision for juveniles and good practice in reception, particularly given the challenging nature of the young people in custody there. However I recognise that there are areas of concern, and the governor and staff are working hard to address these.

"New arrangements have come into force which should improve performance for both court escorts and safer custody, whilst induction procedures are being reviewed to address bullying, and complaints procedures have been improved. Special cells are used rarely, and only as a last resort where trainees have become a danger to themselves and the members of staff who are attempting to support them."

### **Notes to editors**

1. The announced inspection of YOI Stoke Heath took place on 17-21 January 2005.
1. Stoke Heath is a young offenders institution holding young adult men aged 18-21 and juveniles under 18.
1. Its last inspection took place on 29 - 31 May 2001.
1. Inspectorate reports and releases are available at:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/justice/prisons/inspprison>

5. For an electronic copy of the report or to request an interview with Anne Owers, please call 020 7035 4381.

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