

HMP Wormwood Scrubs has greatly improved and is gradually implementing fundamental changes, under considerable population pressure, said the Chief Inspector of Prisons, Anne Owers, publishing the report of a full announced inspection.

The local prison for adult male prisoners in London has had a troubled history and reputation, with management struggling to achieve control and change; and on the last inspection 'had stalled or was sliding backwards on all key indicators'.

Anne Owers today commended prison management, welcoming the progress made, but also pointing to remaining areas of weakness that require action, in particular the absence of sufficient activity for prisoners.

Anne Owers said:

"It is gratifying to report that nearly two years on from the last inspection Wormwood Scrubs is a greatly improved prison, coping with problems that are common to our overcrowded local prisons; and on some of our measures coping better than other large London locals.

"It was providing a consistent, if inadequate regime; dedicated first night support, which needed to be supported by stronger suicide and self-harm procedures; and an innovative and outward looking resettlement unit and structure. Above all it showed a measurable and significant improvement in relationships between staff and prisoners, with 75% of prisoners saying that staff treated them with respect."

The most significant area of weakness related to the quantity and quality of purposeful activity available to prisoners. Exercise or time out of the cell was less than in 2001 and below the national average. Only 36% of eligible prisoners were engaged in education or work off the wings and activity spaces were often unfilled. Specialist populations, such as lifers and vulnerable prisoners, needed further attention. New work on legal services, foreign nationals and detoxification was commended, but needed to be maintained; and anti-bullying work needed further development.

Anne Owers said

"This has required considerable management effort, which needs to

continue: not only because of the prison's history but also because of current overcrowding pressures. There is still much to do, in a difficult and stressful environment. Nevertheless, what has been achieved, and is now bedded in, is a tribute to the efforts of managers and staff. This report sets out the next steps they need to take."

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

"I am very pleased that the Chief inspector has recognised the improvements in the regime at Wormwood Scrubs. The Governor and staff deserve great credit for the improvements that have been achieved in the face of tremendous external pressures.

"However I acknowledge that there is more to do, and the prison is already making substantial steps forward in several areas identified by the inspection report, including provision of purposeful activity, offending behaviour programmes and drug strategy."

NOTE TO EDITORS:

1. The full announced inspection of HMP Wormwood Scrubs was carried out between 3-7 November 2003. The last unannounced inspection of HMP Wormwood Scrubs was carried out between 10-19 December 2001.

2 . Prison Inspectorate reports and press releases are available at

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