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020 3334 3527

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**HMPYOI ROCHESTER – TOO LITTLE ACTIVITY**

HMPYOI Rochester was performing reasonably well in three of four key areas, but there was far too little purposeful activity for the young men there, said Dame Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the report of a unannounced short follow-up inspection of the young offender institution in Kent.

Rochester became a dedicated prison for sentenced young adult men in 2002. Since then it has virtually doubled in size. However, education, work or training was available for only about half the expanded population, and some provision was of poor quality.

Inspectors found:

- Rochester was reasonably safe, but violence reduction and suicide prevention procedures were underdeveloped, despite a significant number of assaults, and considerable evidence of bullying.
- Staff-prisoner relationships were good, and staff clearly knew their young prisoners – though personal officer work was unfocused.
- Aspects of diversity – particularly disability and work with foreign nationals – were underdeveloped. However, considerable efforts had gone into identifying and addressing the perceptions of black and minority ethnic prisoners, who reported favourably on their time at Rochester.
- Offender management had recently expanded, but was not yet effectively linked with other resettlement activities or with residential staff, and custody planning for short-term prisoners was not yet effective
- There were no specialist services for young men with alcohol problems.
- Achievements in education were poor in many areas, the curriculum was narrow, and classroom efficiency was as low as 55%.
- There were only 90 vocational training places, which provided some useful skills. However, 85 young men were engaged in repetitive and mundane contract work.
- The prison was over-reporting prisoners' time out of cell, which was at most eight hours a day, and more usually half that.

Anne Owers said:

“It is commendable that this inspection found that Rochester was performing reasonably well against three of our key tests: safety, respect and resettlement. As the population continues to increase, it will be important to

strengthen the procedures that underpin safety, given the volatility of the population.

“It is, however, unacceptable that the provision and quality of purposeful activity had not kept pace with the expansion, and the needs, of the population. This will make it more difficult to run a safe establishment, but crucially it will also do little to improve the life chances, and reduce the risk of reoffending, for many of the young men held there.”

Phil Wheatley, Director General of the National Offender Management Service, said:

“I am pleased that the Chief Inspector’s report recognises the positive and effective work going on at Rochester, and I commend staff for continuing to manage well this group of challenging young prisoners during the expansion of the prison.

“We are looking to maximise the activity available to young people to bring it in line with the needs of the increased population, and we also hope to increase capacity within the education department this year. The newly appointed Violence Reduction Co-ordinator will be focusing on anti-bullying concerns, and the violence reduction strategy has been reviewed to better manage the needs of a Young Offender population.”

### **Notes for Editors**

1. The full report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 2 July 2009 at <http://inspectors.justice.gov.uk/hmiprisons>
2. The short unannounced follow-up inspection of HMP Rochester was carried out 16–18 February 2009.
3. The operational capacity at HMP Rochester at the time of the inspection was 642.
4. The last inspection of HMP Rochester took place from 9–13 January 2006.
5. Anne Owers, Chief Inspector, is available for interview. If you would like to speak to her please contact Tom Hodson in the Press Office on 0203 334 3527.