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HMP SEND – SIGNIFICANT DETERIORATION IN KEY AREAS

HMP Send had deteriorated significantly, particularly in relation to safety, since the last inspection, said Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the report of an unannounced short follow-up inspection of the women's training prison in Surrey.

At the last inspection, in early 2006, inspectors assessed the prison as being very safe and respectful, with reasonable purposeful activity and resettlement provision. At this inspection, inspectors found slippage in many important areas, and a worrying deterioration in aspects of safety, as the prison struggled with the impact of a less settled prisoner population and serious staffing issues.

Inspectors found

- Women spent too long in reception and faced an unnecessary routine strip search. The subsequent induction programme was haphazard.
- There was no violence reduction strategy and anti-bullying arrangements were weak. Women had no confidence in the system and some incidents, such as unexplained injuries, were not reported.
- Incidents of self-harm had increased from 8 a month to an average of 20 since the previous inspection. Tragically, there had been two deaths in custody and 12 incidents requiring outside hospital treatment. Self-harm prevention documentation was variable in quality.
- Staff-prisoner relationships were generally positive, but were undermined by the churn of staff and the difficulty of ensuring an appropriate proportion of female officers. Too many staff were from other establishments, or new to prison work, and unfamiliar with the particular risks and needs of women in prison.
- Accommodation was generally good quality, and chaplaincy support good. Race issues were well managed, but support for foreign nationals was still in its infancy. Prisoners were dissatisfied with healthcare, which also suffered from staff shortages.
- There was plenty of time out of cell, and a range of activities, but the prison had expanded without an equivalent increase in activity places. Over half the women on the resettlement unit were found to have no purposeful activity.

- The resettlement strategy did not focus on the needs of the increased proportion of short-term prisoners. There was a backlog in offender assessments. The range of interventions to address need was limited but drug services were good.
- Send benefited from the only female therapeutic community (TC) in the country. There was now a waiting list for this impressive facility, but the number of participants was restricted because the TC could not retain sufficient staff.

Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons, said:

“Send has gone through a very unsettled period, with an expansion of its population and an increase in short-term prisoners, but without sufficient investment in the regime.

“The pervasive impact of the inability to recruit and retain staff had resulted in shortages, an influx of inexperienced staff and difficulty in maintaining an appropriate gender balance.

“On top of this, there had been an excessive turnover of governors – three in less than two years – and further uncertainty created by a new clustering arrangement with a women’s prison in Sutton.

“The outcome had been slippage in some important areas since our previous inspection, including a worrying deterioration in aspects of safety. Send requires regional and national support to achieve a period of badly needed stability, so that it can focus on addressing the increased challenges that it faces.”

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

“There is no doubt that the Chief Inspector has accurately described the main difficulties facing Send at the time of the inspection.

“The Governor and staff at Send are committed to drive forward change at the prison. I am pleased that there has already been progress in recruitment, in violence reduction and in staff searching.”

Notes for Editors

1. A copy of the full report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 27 January 2009 at <http://inspectors.justice.gov.uk/hmiprison>
2. The short unannounced follow-up inspection of HMP Send was carried out from 18 – 22 August 2008. The last full inspection of HMP Send took place in February 2006.
3. The operational capacity at HMP Send is 282.
4. In June 1998, in response to the large increase in the numbers of female prisoners, Send was re-assigned as a closed female prison and

underwent a large-scale refurbishment. In 2007, further expansion started to accommodate a further 64 prisoners. In March 2008, the first of the additional prisoners arrived. The prison accommodates the only female prison therapeutic community (TC).

5. Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons, is available for interview. If you would like to speak to her please contact the Press Office on 0203 334 3527.