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020 7210 8643

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HMP THE VERNE – FOREIGN NATIONALS ROLE NEEDS DEVELOPING

HMP The Verne, where two-thirds of its prisoners were foreign nationals, was largely safe and well-run, but found it difficult to meet all the needs of its mixed prisoner population, said Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the report of a full announced inspection into the prison.

Inspectors found that significant concerns about safety at the last inspection had largely been addressed, though more robust procedures were needed to prevent and monitor self-harm and bullying.

Staff related well to their mixed prisoner population, though more cultural awareness training was needed. There was no comprehensive strategy to meet the needs of foreign nationals, particularly in relation to activities and resettlement. There was limited use of professional interpretation for confidential matters such as healthcare.

Dormitory accommodation in the old casemates was entirely inappropriate. It was only usable at all because the Kainos programme was running it on therapeutic community lines. This wing should be taken out of use as soon as possible.

Inspectors also found:

- Education standards were high, with a focus on language skills;
- There was sufficient activity for most prisoners;
- The absence of a Muslim chaplain was a serious deficiency in a prison where 14% of the population were Muslim.

Anne Owers said:

“The Verne is a well-run and safe prison. But it is in effect an open prison with walls. It can only operate under very restrictive allocation criteria, which in practice result in a high proportion of foreign national prisoners; and it has developed considerable expertise in dealing with that population. By contrast, it not best placed to meet the needs of the fairly small number of suitable British prisoners who cannot be held in open conditions. In previous reports, we have recommended that The Verne be a designated foreign national centre; we still consider this would be the best option. “

Phil Wheatley, Prison Service Director General said:

"I welcome the Chief Inspector's recognition of HMP The Verne's considerable expertise in dealing with a large population of foreign national prisoners who present unique challenges. The Chief Inspector's recommendation that The Verne become a designated foreign national centre will be considered as part of a wider review into the management of foreign national prisoners. Such a change would only be possible if it ensured the full use of all the available accommodation at The Verne.

"The Verne continues to offer a safe environment for all prisoners, with good relationships between staff and prisoners, and I am pleased that this is reflected in the Chief Inspector's report. "

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. A full copy of the HMCIP report into HMP the Verne is available from <http://inspectrates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprisons/>
2. HMP The Verne is a category C training prison for adult male prisoners, including life-sentenced prisoners.
3. The full announced inspection took place between 6–10 August 2007
4. To request an interview with Anne Owers, please call 020 7210 8803.

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