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HMP WORMWOOD SCRUBS – PROGRESS HALTED IN KEY AREAS

There had been a drift in all key areas in HMP Wormwood Scrubs, which urgently needed to be reversed, said Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the report of an announced inspection of the adult male prison in North West London.

Recent inspections had charted slow but steady progress. This inspection found no evidence of an abusive or negative staff culture, and also found that the quality of education had improved. However, in the key areas of safety, respect, purposeful activity and resettlement, progress had halted and drifted back, in a prison operating under considerable pressure and receiving around 300 prisoners a week.

Inspectors found:

- Reception, first night and induction procedures were not sufficiently supportive or consistent, and staff involvement was limited. There were unsafe practices in relation to those prisoners withdrawing from drugs.
- There were some good initiatives in relation to violence reduction and suicide prevention. However, reviews of those at risk of self-harm needed improvement. The incidence of drugs encouraged intimidation and gang activity, and the prison's anti-bullying work was underdeveloped. As a consequence, 44% of prisoners said they had felt unsafe in the prison.
- Staff were insufficiently proactive. Residential staff involvement in aspects of prisoner care and rehabilitation – such as diversity and resettlement – was weak, and there was considerable evidence of regime slip and late arrivals, or failures to arrive, at activities.
- There had been improvements in the quality of education and training, but there was not enough of it. Around half the prisoners, at any one time, had nothing to do. Time out of cell was also poor and applied inconsistently across the wings. The prison's reported statistics were unrealistic.
- Resettlement was the prison's strongest area, with some good partnerships with voluntary organisations and a strong offender management unit. However, there was no clear strategy linking this work

and no custody planning for short-term prisoners, the majority of the population.

Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons said:

“Like all local prisons, Wormwood Scrubs was subject to constant daily pressure and it required considerable work by both managers and staff simply to ensure its successful day-to-day operation.

“However, this inspection identified some gaps and risks in significant areas which required a stronger management grip and greater involvement by residential staff.

“If these areas are addressed, however, there is no reason why the prison cannot resume the progress we identified in previous inspections.”

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

“I am pleased that the Inspection has found no evidence of an abusive or negative staff culture at HMP Wormwood Scrubs, something which has been an issue in the past.

“It is disappointing that there has been a drift in progress in certain areas, though as the Chief Inspector points out this is in the context of continuous operational pressure. “

“The inspection has refocused the governor and staff at Wormwood Scrubs on driving forward improvements and there has already been success in tackling illegal drug use and progress in implementing the recommendations made by the Inspectorate, specifically in relation to new arrivals and the establishment of a formal personal officer scheme.”

Notes for Editors

1. A copy of the full report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 18 November 2008 at <http://inspectorates.justice.gov.uk/hmiprisons>
2. The announced inspection of HMP Wormwood Scrubs was carried out from 9 June to 13 June 2008.
3. The operational capacity at HMP Wormwood Scrubs at the time of the inspection was 1,239
4. The last inspection of HMP Wormwood Scrubs took place from 3-4 October 2005.
5. HMP Wormwood Scrubs is a category B local male prison, serving the Crown and the magistrates' courts of North West London. The prison was built between 1875 and 1891. In 1902 the last female prisoner was transferred to HMP Holloway. In 1922 one wing became a borstal. During World War II the prison was used by the War Department. In 1994 a new

hospital wing was completed, and in 1996 two of the four wings were refurbished to modern standards, and a fifth wing completed.

6. Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons, is available for interview. If you would like to speak to her please contact Andrew Winstone in the Press Office on 0203 334 3530.