

YOI THORN CROSS - A VERY POSITIVE INSPECTION

“Thorn Cross is a small, complex establishment that provides a safe, respectful and relaxed environment in which to prepare young offenders for release into the community”, said Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the report of a full announced inspection.

Thorn Cross Young Offender Institution is unique. It provides three different regimes on a single site: the only open facility for juveniles in the country, an open facility for young adults and the high intensity-training project (HIT). It is also a pilot site for the new approach to joint prison and probation offender management.

The report commended safety at Thorn Cross, although it identified some areas of child protection that required improvement, and expressed disappointment that relationships with the local Samaritans had broken down. It also found relationships between staff and young people to be very good, although more effort was required to respond to perceptions of disadvantage amongst some black and minority ethnic young people.

There was a good range of services and activities, although scope remained to improve co-ordination and expand the number of vocational opportunities. The HIT programme was being redesigned to improve the number of successful completions, and thus sustain a worthwhile British version of the “boot camp” concept.

Inspectors were particularly impressed by the close working of prison and probation staff to manage young offenders through their sentence and back out into the community in a concerted effort to reduce re-offending. However, limited use was being made of release on temporary licence following a well-publicised failure and the report encourages further work to restore the confidence of the local community and thus allow greater use of this important stepping stone towards effective release.

Anne Owers said:

“Overall, this was a very positive inspection of an important and complex establishment which undertakes some unique work with young offenders. There remain a number of areas for development, notably the re-launch of the HIT project and further development of the offender management model, but the governor and his staff are to be congratulated on progress so far.”

Phil Wheatley, Director General of the Prison Service said:

“The management team and all the staff at HMYOI Thorn Cross must be congratulated on a positive inspection and steps have already been taken to address the concerns raised about the use of release on temporary licence and the Samaritans.

“The Prison is a pathfinder establishment for the development of end-to-end offender management using collaborative working between prison and probation staff. The fact that the Chief Inspector recognised considerable progress here is a positive sign for the future development of the National Offender Management Service.”

Notes to editors

1. The announced inspection of YOI Thorn Cross took place on 18 - 22 April 2005.
2. YOI Thorn Cross is an open young offender institution (YOI)/juvenile split site with the emphasis on resettlement of offenders.
3. The full report is available from the Home Office Press Office.
4. Deputy Chief Inspector of Prisons Nigel Newcomen is available for interview after 4:00pm on 11th October and most of 12th October. For an electronic copy of the report or to request an interview please call 020 7035 3850.