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**Minister Dermot Ahern**  
**Dept. Of Justice, Equality & Law Reform**  
**94 St Stephens Green**  
**Dublin 2**  
**15 December 2008**

**Dear Minister,**  
**Castlerea Prison Visiting Committee is pleased to present its Annual**  
**report for the year 2008.**

## **Visiting Committee Annual Report 2008**

### **Introduction**

The Visiting Committee was made up of ten members including the welcome addition of Mr Martin Leonard, Mr. Seamus Kelly, & Ms Mary Darcy. The Committee held meetings on the first Thursday of each month, these meetings were always very well attended. Two members of the Committee visited the prison on a random basis every month, with a report given to the Committee.

### **Overcrowding**

Once again the Committee was very concerned with the overcrowding taking place in Castlerea prison, the cell population for the prison is 214 but during the year there was a high of 262 in custody, which put enormous pressure on both staff and prisoners who ended up sleeping on mattresses on the floor. The remand prisoners of which there are 20 places hit a high during the year of 62. The Committee is disappointed that the new remand unit to be operational in 2008 was not completed in time.

### **Chaplaincy**

The Chaplain is Ms Margaret Connaughton, a lay person. Pastoral care also requires that she promotes Christian and human values within the prison. This is done by planning liturgies, celebrating key seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter. We have a priest who celebrates Mass every Sunday morning. On other occasions people are invited from the outside to present e.g.. Advent meditation, gospel reflections etc. Parish choirs are also invited to participate in liturgies, especially at Christmas and Easter. Legion of Mary also visit the prison on a weekly basis and prisoners are encouraged to meet with them.

### **Surgery**

They have a number of new initiatives ongoing in the area currently. They are now 100% compliant with IPS vaccination policy, where by all prisoners are now offered vaccination against hep B on committal. There is an average of 70% uptake on this. They are running a Health screening programme for Lifers initially, and it is hoped when this is complete to run it out over the whole prison



population. They are in the process of setting up a formal Health promotion schedule for prisoners, where by nursing staff will deliver talks and information sessions on relevant medical topics. In 2008 they have introduced a new system of medication management. They have a contracted pharmacy service now, who prepare and blister all the medication for administration to prisoners. Dental waiting list running at 3 - 4 weeks currently. Counselling service provided by Merchants Quay are proving to be very effective and beneficial to us in the Medical area. New committals are now seen within 24 hours of committal. The Doctor now attends every day, including weekends if necessary. The Optician & Chiropodist attend as necessary. The Psychologist attends once a week for a Clinic. The Visiting Psychiatrist attends as often as requested. The Visiting Psychiatrist Dr Seamus Geraghty is due to retire in the near future and we would like to express our sincere thanks to him for his invaluable and generous service to Castlerea Prison over the last number of years, and to wish him well in his retirement.

### **Tuck Shop**

The Prison Tuck Shop is a resounding success. It supplies a large array of items for Prisoners to purchase. It also supplies newspapers to allow prisoners to stay in touch with current affairs. The staff can also arrange for special purchases with the permission of the Governor.

### **Horticulture**

The Prison supplied the town of Castlerea with hundreds of Hanging Baskets for the annual Tidy Towns Competition. These brightened up the town and made a great impression on all who saw them. The local Tidy Towns Committee expressed their gratitude to all concerned.

### **Comparative Prison Visit**

During the year, Castlerea Prison Visiting Committee visited Cork Prison for a Comparative Prison Visit. The visit was a great success. We were very impressed with the facilities available in Cork, even though it is physically a very small area. It made us appreciative of all the space we have available in Castlerea. We would like to thank the Governor and Staff of Cork Prison for their hospitality on the day.

## **Inspector of Prisons**

We had a meeting with Mr Justice Michael Reilly, the Inspector of Prisons. We had a frank discussion with him about a variety of topics. We would like to thank him for his time and we look forward to his report of his inspection.

## **Work & Training.**

While the prison strive for full engagement with Work and Training in Castlereagh Prison, we can say that we have positions for all those who wish to avail of it. To this end we provide a range of opportunities in the following areas.

### **Light Assembly**

Currently the prison operate two workshops which are engaged in light assembly work for the paint industry. Here offenders work on a piece work system and can earn a nominal amount for work carried out. In addition these offenders have the opportunity to pursue FETAC awards both in integrated assignments and in the preparation for work modules. These workshops have a combined capacity of 14 offenders at any given time. 2 acting AIS's assigned for this duty.

### **Computer/Print Workshop**

This area combines computer skills training with a work based environment. Training is provided in a range of certifiable skills including ECDL and Pitman's at various levels including advanced. The workshop provides for all of the in-house stationery and printing needs and also produces booklets, manuals, invitations for outside groups. While the shop provides consistent employment for 8 offenders it is used by others who are keen to pursue the ECDL at their own pace. The workshop has been awarded the Irish Computer Society best practice award in the Government sector. Produces a once monthly newsletter which can be used as an information source for the management to inform prisoners of certain things, also takes input for the school and inmates themselves. Staffed by one Industrial Supervisor.



### **Fabric Shop**

Within this workshop offenders are provided with industrial sewing skills. Trainees have the opportunity to earn a nominal amount by assembling Sheets of patch work for use in the millenary trade. The shop also provides kitchen wear and towels for use in the prison. Another element of the shop is the training in and the use of an industrial embroidery machine. This combines both sewing and computer skills. This process has been used to support charitable projects within the community. This shop has a capacity of 8 offenders. It is staffed by a acting industrial supervisor.

### **Joinery/ Carpentry**

Trainees in this area are instructed in the use of both hand tools and larger industrial joinery equipment.

Here workers are provided with skills in pursuance of both level 3 and level 5 FETAC. All of this is practically based and a broad range of items are produced including gates, doors, furniture and planters. Current capacity is 8 trainees, however students from the school are also facilitated for work experience. Staffed by 1 AIS.

### **Main Kitchen**

Here the prison provide a wide range of training within a production kitchen. This training ranges from elementary cookery (Leonardo) to Professional Cookery under the National Apprenticeship Programme. In addition to this the kitchen is operated to the highest standards and currently holds the Emerald Award from Excellence Ireland. While the working capacity of the kitchen is 15 we can increase this to 20 while classes are being held. Staffed by 4 AISs and 1 IS , Prisoners now entering their final year of professional cookery.

### **Laundry**

The laundry not only provides a valuable service within the Prison but also provides training to those working there. The main emphasis is to enable trainees pursue a career in Laundry services. We are currently seeking to provided training to Guild of Launderers standard. 5 offenders currently work in this area. Staffed by 1 AIS.

### **Cleaners**

This is a valuable service throughout the prison and we are pursuing the introduction of Industrial Cleaning Skills with FETAC accreditation. While the numbers engaged in this work vary we can have up to 18 offenders occupied in this way in the main prison block.

### **Painters**

Again this is a useful and very employable skill. Offenders who show an aptitude for this type of work are afforded the opportunity to work after some initial instruction and generally pursue this occupation combined with other activities such as the school. 6 offenders are engaged currently.

### **The Grove**

All offenders in this area have some form of work. Those who can not perform heavier tasks provide light house work in their own houses. There were two houses renovated by prisoners in the Grove during the year, it was a credit to all involved in this project.

### **Concrete Products**

This has proven to be a popular activity among Offenders. They can work here and combine their time with the education unit. Here they are taught the skills necessary to produce products of the highest standard. A number of offenders also paint the final products. Staffed by 1 AIS.

### **Garden Furniture**

Skills learnt in the main prison provide the basis for working in this production based joinery workshop.

Garden furniture including picnic benches, play towers etc. are produced to the highest standards. Trainees can continue their pursuance of FETAC accreditation here. Staffed by 1 IS who is also responsible for Joinery Main block.



### **Horticulture**

Training is provided in conjunction with the education unit and all trainees have the opportunity to pursue FETAC accreditation. In addition offenders in this area provide an invaluable service in keeping the grounds at their best. Supervised by the AIS in the Waste management.

### **Waste Management**

In line with our commitment to environmental issues we provide the best possible training in waste management. We are in the process of introducing HETAC accreditation for this training. We are currently leaders in the implementation of composting techniques and are almost cost neutral in the management of all our other waste. 10 offenders currently work in this area with an expected increase to 15 in the coming weeks. It is hoped that funding will be available to complete the waste water programme, as there is great savings to be gained.

### **Catering**

While not as prominent as the main kitchen this kitchen provides an equally good service both in terms of training to it's workers and in terms of good food to the residents of the area.

Overall it has been a good year for the workshop areas whereby all offenders were interviewed and offered some activity but not all found it a suitable pastime while others really benefited, the co-operation between ourselves and the education unit has been excellent and this partnership has to remain strong to get the full benefits for the inmates, the prison recently concluded a pre-release programme for ten inmates in the grove area , this year they intend to run 2 more programmes in the main block.

### **Operational Support Group**

The operational Support Group was established in 2008 and charged with the following tasks.

Support the Governor of each prison in stemming supply of contraband to prisoners.

Enhance security in all prisons.

Gather and collate intelligence.

Prevent criminals from directing operations from behind bars.

Train and develop staff assigned to each unit to a level which will enhance their ability to perform their function to the highest standard.

The group is comprised of 3 units in each prison.

S.S.U. Security Screening Unit – screening all persons entering prisons.

O.S.U. Operational Support Unit – carrying out targeted searches in all areas of prisons

Canine Unit – screening persons entering prisons for signs of drug residue.

All persons entering prisons will be subject to the following airport style security at the entry point.

- a) Walk through metal detector
- b) X-ray machine
- c) Hand held detector
- d) Pat down search where necessary
- e) Screening by the passive drug dog.

Pat down searches where necessary will be carried out with due regard to the decency, privacy and dignity of the person being searched, by persons of their own gender. Any visitor declining a pat down search must leave the prison immediately.

The Gardaí will be notified in the case of any person being found in possession of contraband of any kind and the person will not be allowed into the prison under any circumstances.

Visitors on whom the drug dog indicates will have their visit rescheduled or be offered a screened visit.



## Probation Service

### Team Composition

- 1 Senior Probation Officer (Responsibility for Probation Service delivery in Castlerea Prison & Loughan House)
- 2 Probation Officers. 1 additional post due November 2008.
- 1 Clerical Officer (assigned 2 days per week to Castlerea prison)

### Current Team Responsibilities

Categories of offenders are prioritised in line with Probation Service policy to ensure that prisoners with a through-care input and Court mandated supervision is prioritised. All other prisoner categories are seen as requested, within two working days.

- Sex Offenders – All sex offenders (Court mandated post-release supervision by the Probation Service & non post-release supervision) are allocated a Probation Officer, who works with the offender to agree a sentence management and release plan. Multidisciplinary approach. Obligations under Sex Offender Act 2001 explained to the prisoner. Referral to relevant internal agencies (education, chaplain, addiction counselling, AA etc.) and external services (Co. Council, SVDP, MABS, etc.) including sex offender treatment programmes in prison & the community.

- Part-Suspended Supervision Orders – These cases have two sentence components – imprisonment coupled with a period suspended under the supervision of the Probation Service. All PSSO cases in Castlerea are active cases to the Probation team. Comprehensive assessment to include risk assessment completed on individual basis. Multidisciplinary approach (education, chaplain, addiction counselling, adult counselling service, linkage scheme, You're Equal Project, AA etc.). Liaison with supervising Probation Officer in the community & relevant external agencies pre-release to co-ordinate release planning.

- Life-Sentenced Prisoners – All life-sentenced prisoners are similarly allocated a Probation Officer, with a focus on sentence management, risk assessment & release plans. Lifer Programme currently running in the main block with programme for lifers in the Grove area planned for the New Year. Parole Board Reports completed as required. Referrals to internal & external services as appropriate.

- Parole Eligible Cases – Comprehensive reports completed and submitted to the Parole Board, to include risk assessments and proposals to address offending behaviour. Parole Board/Ministerial recommendations are subsequently followed up by the Probation Service as appropriate.

- Reports – Team complete District Court remand reports, case conference reports, review meeting reports, parole reports.



- Group work – Co-facilitation of Pre-release Programme three times annually with the Education Unit. Co-ordination of the Access to Abstinence Group annually. Facilitation of the Lifer Programme in block & Grove area. This programme is due for review shortly and will be delivered in line with level of need in the prison. The programme is underpinned by a multidisciplinary ethos, with involvement from internal & external agencies e.g. surgery, psychologist, chaplain, addiction counsellors, parole board, AWARE etc.
- Prisoner Daily Requests – Response to prisoners within two working days. This task is carried out in collaboration & co-operation with prison personnel.
- AA/NA – Co-ordination of weekly AA meetings. Screening prisoners for suitability. Ongoing collaboration with NA in order to reintroduce the resource to Castlerea prison.
- You're Equal Mentoring Scheme – Probation team acts as referral source, chairs monthly case review meetings, escorts mentors around the prison.
- Prison Meetings - Team participate fully in all prison meetings – monthly IPS reviews, integrated services meetings, management meetings and any other meeting as requested by prison management.
- Harristown House – Team have had a liaison role with Harristown House in addition to screening offenders for referral & assessment.
- Risk Management – In consultation with Governor, the team co-ordinate case conferences for high risk cases.
- Suicide Prevention – In cases where an element of risk has been identified or communicated to the Probation Service by family members, solicitors, colleagues in the community etc. the team works with Governors, Class Officers, Surgery and Chief to ensure risk is reduced. Team play active role in suicide prevention meetings in Castlerea prison.
- Child Protection – Lead role in all child protection issues. Primary contact role with HSE & Gardai in such cases.
- Bereavement – Joint working with Chaplain in cases of bereavement.
- Homelessness – Collaboration with and referral to, external agencies for prisoners of no fixed abode. Review of allowances and entitlements to promote smooth transition to resettlement.



## Castlereia Education Unit

### (School)

#### Ethos and aims

To provide a high quality, broad and flexible programme of education that meets the needs of those in custody through helping them

- Cope with their sentence
- Achieve personal development
- Prepare for life after release
- Establish the appetite and capacity for lifelong learning.

The school was opened in November 1998 with 4 teachers and has expanded since then to play an integral role in the prison whereby over 50% of those in custody participate voluntarily in classes.

Allocation 12,000 hours (16 whole time equivalents)

Supervising Teacher and 5 Assistant Supervising Teachers  
Academic year provision which has a staff of 18 teachers on a

regular basis Evening school 5 days a week.

Half terms, Easter and summer programme

Split sites provision (Main Block and the Grove)

**Summer school.**

This year school ran until July 26<sup>th</sup> with good attendance in a wide variety of recreational based classes.

**School enrollments since start of this academic year (Sept 08)**

Interview consists of a very detailed 1:1 session where education, sentence and work are discussed in a holistic way. I usually takes at least 30 minutes to interview and timetable the prisoner for classes. Referrals are made to medics, probation, careers, work if necessary.

The term 'gone' as used below is a loose term to denote those that have left the school which could be transferred, gone to work or just decided to leave the school.

## **The Prison Adult literacy Survey (2002)**

- **Low levels of literacy**

22% scored at Pre-level 1.

31% scored at level 1

52.8% prison which is twice the general population (22.6%).

- **Moderate levels of literacy**

31% scored at level 2&3

Again the prison figure is twice the general population figure.

"It is not simply saying that the average literacy level of prisoners is much lower than the general population. Rather it suggests that the prison population has a much larger group with very poor literacy skills"

"strong relationship between poor literacy skills and certain kinds of crime"

"An important consideration regarding the prison population (with poor literacy) is that they tend to be young and predominately male"

- **Age of school leaving**

13% had never transferred into post- primary school (9% my data) 40% left school at age 14 or younger (23% my data)

Only 12% were still in school at the age of 17(24% my data)

" only less then one quarter described their attendance as very good, and more than one third missed school either quite often or very often"

It is worth noting that my random survey was done on those who are attending school here in Castlereagh and therefore this goes some way to answering why my data was lower displaying a longer time spent in mainstream school.

- **Non Irish Nationals**

Nearly all that attend school have achieved their high school diploma and have no literacy difficulties.

## **The Curriculum**

Objectives, methods and course content are largely those of adult education. Set courses and examination work are but part of prison education because of a high level of turnover in the population and because of the prisoners special needs and interests. The emergence of FETAC accreditation has opened up new possibilities for accreditation.

In broad terms, course may be classified as follows

- Basic Education, including Literacy and Numeracy
- General Subjects, e.g. English, History, Mathematics, Languages, Computers
- Physical Education, Home Economics and Health Education
- The Arts, e.g. Visual arts, Music, Drama, Creative Writing,
- Technology Courses, Woodwork and Horticulture.



- Courses that address particular problems or needs those prisoners have, e.g.  
Pre release course, Drugs awareness.

## **Accreditation**

Leaving certificate English is timetabled and offered but take up continues to be slow. Junior and Leaving certificate is available in other subjects if a group forms. Please note that this two year course has to be delivered in a few months and we must be sure that the student will be here in Castlerea in June. It is worth stating that while the these exams were the mainstay of prison education in the past the introduction of FETAC has been an enormous help to prison education due to the ability to offer accreditation several times during the year. The leaving and junior cert is rarely offered in the community to adults. Prison education has always strove to mirror adult education in the community.

FETAC courses and programmes on *offer* for this academic year.

### **The FETAC level 3 Award**

#### **Core modules**

Communications,

Mathematics

Personal effectiveness

#### **And complete 5 from the**

**following** Art/Design

Computer literacy

Food and Cookery

Food and Nutrition

Health Related

fitness Woodwork

Irish

Career info

Prep for Work

Craft

Horticulture

Music appreciation

GAA Level 1 Coaching

Soccer Kick-start Coaching

Cert Parenting

STEPS

### **FETAC Level 5 Awards**

**These are overall awards similar to what is offered in V.T.O.S., P.L.C.'s and some I.T.'s**

- Business Studies BBSS
- Information Processing BIP
- Art Craft and Design AACD
- Sport and Recreation DSP
- Construction Studies CC ONT
- Cert in Forestry
- Life Long Community Studies DCHS

This course is specifically designed to meet the social and personal needs of those in institutional life. It was designed by teachers in Castlereagh who responded to the needs of those wishing to further their knowledge and understanding in this area. It helps to sustain the student while serving their sentence and to ease their transition from prison life to community life.

Human Growth and Development

Social studies

Health studies

Personal and Social Identity

Drug Related Issues

Safety and Health at Work

- Developing a Humanities Award

Minor certificates are awarded to candidates who successfully complete one or more FETAC modules.

**Other modules offered as elective modules at level 5** Creative Writing

Start your own

Business Sound

Engineering Local

History Studies

Political Studies

Journalism

Furniture making

Horticulture

Safety & Health at

Work Occupational

First Aid Food Hygiene

**There were 105 students entered for this November FETAC assessment**

**Open University**

The main channel for provision of third level education in Irish prisons is the Open University. Presently 3 students are studying through the O.U..

**Lifers Group**



The P.E. teacher (sexual health) and the careers teacher (preparation for work) both did a morning presentation to the group during this term.

### **Visual Art Development**

Art development in the prison education is concerned with the enhancement and support of art learning and teaching.

- Artists in Prison Scheme. John Rowlands is presently doing a 2 week course in the main block. Cathy Carman (sculpture) visited at half term in the Grove supporting the prisoners doing the Christmas cribs.
- Music teacher is recording prisoners and editing a C.D. to be launched with the prison magazine.
- Prisoners are offered the opportunity to make Christmas cards in classes. Sample enclosed.
- The creative writing teacher and the music teacher are having a performance afternoon on December 19<sup>th</sup> when the only criteria for entry is that you must perform. This has proved very worthwhile and a very positive experience for the prisoner in the past. Everyone (including myself) are busy rehearsing.

### **Creative Writing Development**

Prisoners enjoy these activities as they have the potential to enable prisoners to develop and express themselves.

- Writers in prison Scheme. Dermot Healy has visited on several occasions supported by the arts council as editor of the prison magazine which is to be launched in Spring.
- The governor has kindly agreed to sponsor the publication costs of the prison magazine. The Creative Writing and the Art teacher are working extensively with the officer from the Computer work shop preparing the prison magazine for launch in spring. This is a major publication that has involved writings from prisoners, officers, governors and teachers.
- Kate Mc Mahon has visited the lifers group to support prisoners in maintaining relationships with home through writing.

### **Pre-Release**

- This course which is managed and organised by the school, with input from Work and Training and Probation has recently been revised and evaluated. Two new facilitators have been selected for this academic year and a course has just started this week in the Grove. This is a 3 week course run over 3 days with a group of 11. Many outside agencies are invited to give presentations on relevant issues.

## **Resources and Accommodation**

- In late September the education budget was closed with the result that all spending was suspended for the remaining financial year. This budget covers the costs of all our resources, staffing excluded. Work and Training stepped in to cover the resource costs of the pre-release and the Governor did likewise for the prison magazine.
- The school is indebted to the officers from Trades and Work and Training who refurbished the Home Economics room in the Grove with the support of the Governor. The standard of work is excellent and the teachers are most thankful for their support.
- Librarian. The county council has appointed a librarian who is due to take up position before Christmas. The county council have agreed a financial grant towards the costs of fitting out the new library and IPS (estates) have committed to the costs of same for the next financial year. The Governor and the chief have worked actively in supporting the work of establishing the library service.



## **Conclusion**

The Committee would like to welcome you Minister Dermot Ahern and congratulate you on your appointment. We would like to thank the previous Minister Brian Lenihan for his positive contribution.

The introduction of the New Security Units including the Canine Unit are a very welcome addition to Castlerea Prison and will enhance the security within same.

The fact that there has been no major incident throughout 2008 taking into account the introduction of these new security features, is a great compliment to the Governor and Staff of Castlerea Prison.

The Committee strongly believes that there should be a step down accommodation, i.e. half way house, in each prison catchment area to help ex- prisoners return to the community.

Finally the Committee would like to thank the Governor Daniel Scannell and his Staff for the courtesy and help throughout 2008.

**VISITING COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2008**

Michael Nevin

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Edward Brady

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Paddy Greaney

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Luie Mc Entire

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Martin Daly

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Evelyn Varley

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Seamus Kilgannan

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Mary Darcy

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Séamus Kelly

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Martin Leonard

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