

Portlaoise Prison
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Minister for Justice, Equality & Law Reform,
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Visiting Committee Annual Report 2008

We, the members of the Visiting Committee at Portlaoise Prison are pleased to present our Annual Report for the year ending 31st December, 2008.

The Committee met on the first Tuesday of each month throughout the year and the attendance at these meetings were very good with the majority attending every meeting. Two members of the Committee also visited the Prison once a month on an unannounced visit. Members of the Committee visited different areas of the Prison on these dates and were available to meet with prisoners who wish to speak with them.

The Committee met with ten individual prisoners throughout the year who had minor issues that they wished to discuss such as transfer requests, Temporary Release requests and family visits issues. The Committee then raised each issue with the Governor, made some recommendations and were satisfied with the outcome or action taken on each occasion.

We are pleased to report that the main work on the new C Block is completed and are awaiting some minor work regarding the furnishing of the building and locking system to be finished and we are hopeful that it will be ready for occupation in early Spring of 2009.

Throughout the year, we visited the new block during different stages of its progress and are looking forward to a modern building with in cell sanitation for the housing of offenders in this Prison.

We are happy to report that all the prisoners were provided with a very good health care system throughout the year and that the general health of all prisoners

throughout the year was very good. The Medical Officer's (Dr Chidley) position is now full time at the Prison and along with the Nurse Officers and Medical Orderlies provides excellent care for all the prisoners. A Physiotherapist from the local hospital also visits the Prison on a weekly basis and provides an excellent clinic for prisoners requiring treatment. There is also a Psychologist visiting the Prison on a weekly basis and more often if required. Other medical services are provided by a visiting psychiatrist, dentist, chiropodist and optician.

The Catholic chaplain, Fr Drumm and the Church of Ireland Minister continue to care for the spiritual needs of the prisoners.

The Committee welcomes the appointment of a full time, Probation Officer at the Prison. The Probation Officer addresses a wide range of issues with the prisoners such as offending behaviour, anger management, addiction, coping skills, problem solving skills and resettlement issues. Much of the work is on an individual basis but groupwork programmes to address anger awareness also took place during the year.

A number of prisoners requested support with sourcing accommodation, social welfare and employment for their release.

The Education Centre has a teaching staff of 29 teachers; 9 full time and 20 part time teachers. 5 teachers from the National College of Art and Design also teach on a part time basis.

A wide range of subjects are offered at basic, intermediate and advanced levels. Some of these subjects include Business Studies, Health Education, Personal Development, Sign writing, Horticulture, Tiling, Pottery, Bodhran making, First Aid, Fly - Tying, Auto Mechanics, Pyrography, Music, Framing, Yoga, Technical Drawing and Drama.

Pre Release courses include Goal Setting, Personal Development, Relationships and Job preparation.

The Education Centre held examinations accredited by the following bodies and a number of prisoners sat exams as per list below in the 2008 calendar year.

Junior Certificate

Leaving Certificate

FETAC

Open University

Trinity Guildhall

Scrudu Ceol Tire Comhaltas

Royal Irish Academy of Music

First Aid / C.P.R.

Extra Curricular activities and special achievements during the year were as follows :

Entries and winners in Dunmaise Amateur Art Competition

Drama Production

Listowel Writers Week Winners

Educational Trust Links

New Craft Developments - Stonework

Visiting Speakers programme

Visiting Soccer teams

The Industrial Supervisor in charge of the Kitchen and his team of Assistant Industrial Supervisors continue to produce very high standards in the preparation, cooking and distribution of food on a daily basis.

All prisoners working in the Kitchen took part in certifiable training which involves an Induction Course, Hygiene, Manual Handling, Kitchen Safety and Environmental Awareness. This training is given to them locally by the Industrial Supervisor.

The prisoners also took part in a number of certifiable courses i.e. EHOA exams and FETAC Level 3.

Once again, we congratulate the Governor and staff in this area on achieving the Q Mark and the Taoiseach's Award for Excellence in Catering.

We welcome the introduction of the new searching procedures and the introduction of the drug dog at the Prison.

We would like to thank the Director General, Mr Brian Purcell and his team for meeting with us and giving us a very informative talk and giving us the opportunity to ask him varied questions regarding many different topics and aspects of the Prison Service.

In conclusion, we would like to thank Governor Whelan and his staff for the courtesy, hospitality and assistance given to us during the year on our visits to the Prison.

Thomas Colgan

Tom Colgan
Chairman

Anne Turley

Anne Turley

Eilish Croke

Eilish Croke

Michael J Hough

Michael J Hough

Susan Meagher

Susan Meagher

Richie Molloy

Richie Molloy

P. J Long

PJ Long

Liam Mc Cabe

Liam Mc Cabe

William Foley

William Foley

Claire O Mahoney

Claire O Mahoney

Tim Long

Tim Long