

St Patrick's Institution
Prison Visiting Committee Annual Report for Year ending
31st December 2008

We, the members of the Visiting Committee for St Patrick's Institution are pleased to submit our annual report for 2008 to Mr Dermot Ahern, TD., Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

The committee met monthly in St Patrick's institution and the committee members also carried out in excess of 50 unannounced visits to the prison. As in previous years we wish to state that from our observations, the welfare of the prisoners in this institution is of primary concern. The committee wish to record our thanks to the Governor and his staff for their co-operation and courtesy shown to the visiting committee at all times.

During 2008 a number of positive developments were implemented under Governor Quigley, namely the advancement in education opportunities, new security measures and changes in visiting arrangements.

Kitchen :

The food in St Patrick's is excellent and the kitchens are operated to the highest hygienic standards. Being an Institute for young offenders, inmates would like chips and burgers the whole time, but the chef with his very efficient staff, supply a nutritious and varied menu. Members of the committee have sampled the food and found to be it very satisfactory. Some inmates are also employed in the kitchen and this is a much sought after job.

Accommodation:

The accommodation in St Patrick's is in single cell units, to accommodate a maximum of 216 inmates. Towards the end of this year extra pressure was placed on the accommodation in St Patrick's. The IPS is obliged by statute to take offenders sentenced by the courts. As a result, some prisoners have to be placed on Temporary Release and others have to double up in their cells. This interferes with the proper management of the prison, including the planned comprehensive release scheme for inmates.

The committee would urge the Minister to review this practice.

Education

Education in St. Patrick's Institution continues to provide a broad range of services and a comfortable, learning and adaptable environment for the inmates. An excellent range of subjects is offered from basic literacy skills to preparation for State Examinations (Junior Cert and Leaving Cert) to 3rd Level FETAC modules. As new levels of FETAC modules are more attainable than before, more inmates are pursuing this option. Incentives were offered to inmates who undertook State Examinations. The committee feel that more incentives should be offered to all inmates to encourage them to attend and use the facilities that are available.

The committee are pleased to report that classes will now be offered to the inmates on Protection. Classes will include Art, Cookery and Literacy. A carpentry/woodwork class has been introduced in the

new school. Opportunities are offered to the inmates to exhibit and present their work carried out in the school. Examples include murals, art, crafts etc.

Workshops:

The assignments programme is done by way of interview and inmates are assigned accordingly. There is a very impressive and thorough system welding shop .

The normal class consists of 12 daily. This is a very modern workshop and much in demand, presently the shop is making sheltering for smoking areas. Unfortunately there are no courses going on at the moment, a position that the committee feel concerned about.

Certified courses that carry Fetac accreditations are not in place at present, the importance of which can't be understated. The setting up of the workshops in 2006 has been a great success. This was clearly stated in our annual report of 2007 and agreed by all concerned. It is worth noting the workshops are an integral part of the successful structures that are in place in St. Patrick's institution.

While they are much in demand and very well run and supervised their status has dropped somewhat since last year. We are aware that the process of promotional outlets for staff is ongoing in the IPS. Senior promotions took place over a relatively short period of time and with the change of personnel continuity has been disrupted.

At the moment the workshops aren't registered to accommodate state exams. For the last two years Junior and Leaving Cert, and Level Fetac modules have been done in the school, as has been stated.

The workshops were also registered to do so, but this is no longer the case. We are very concerned that this situation should be rectified as soon as possible.

Gym:

Because of the age profile of the prisoners, the gyms are the most popular facility in the prison. These are supervised by NCEF qualified staff. Some of the equipment needs to be repaired/replaced as soon as possible. D Block Gym is the most popular in the prison but access to the gym has been limited. This is a worrying situation. D Block is the drug-free wing in the prison. The inmates are requested to give urine samples at any time to maintain this status. One of the major incentives for the prisoners of D Block was the Gym. The committee feel that limiting access is a disincentive to anybody in rehabilitation.

Library:

There are two libraries in St Patrick's, which are very well used. Newspapers, board games and books are available. We fully support the librarian in trying to promote the use of same.

Chess:

Some years ago, St Patrick's were renowned for their chess teams. This had fallen off over the last few years but we are happy to report that chess has recommenced. Governor Quigley recently purchased 20 new chess sets, and in time hopes to have visiting chess teams.

Visits and visiting facilities:

As discussed in last year's annual report, new screens were erected in the visiting centre. As reported last year, these were poorly installed and the acoustics still do not allow for adequate interaction between visitor and prisoner. This is a fundamental right and it is unacceptable that the situation continues. We understand that the work was under the supervision of the IPS Estates Division, and we would urge the Minister to investigate how money was paid when the work was not completed to standard.

Furthermore we would request the Minister to make funds available to rectify this ongoing problem.

During the year the Governor introduced visits on an appointment basis. Both visitors and prisoners report that this works well.

Family visits take place on Tuesday and Thursday. Initially when they were introduced there was a good uptake. Recently however there has been very low attendance. Perhaps Saturday family visits could be introduced on a trial basis.

New search procedures have been introduced this year, and are very successful. Sniffer dogs are also being used to detect drugs. These two additions are very welcome, as visitors now know there is no way they can carry in drugs. This takes the pressure of friends and relatives to do so.

Children:

Due to the fact that there was no separate detention facility, for 16 and 17 year olds in the institution, we are pleased to report that

Assistant Governor O'Connor has been appointed. She has commenced Positive Sentence Management course for staff. This is to be welcomed.

Samaritans:

Although the Samaritans are involved in most of our prisons where they operate the very successful 'Listener' scheme, it was felt that in St Patrick's the inmates were too young to operate same. The Samaritan Volunteers delivered a pilot training course to 2 groups during July this year. The course covered emotional health awareness, and an introduction to coping skills. The response from the Samaritan Volunteers and the boys who attended the course was very positive. Samaritans plan, with the support of the management of St Patrick's, to run the course 4 times in 2009.

Death and Injury:

The committee are glad to report that there were no deaths in custody last year. There were a total of 21 self-harming incidents, involving 16 individuals. There were 137 inmates in the special observation units during the year.

Inmates requesting to see the committee:

The committee were concerned that we had so few requests to see us. We felt this may have been due to the age profile of the inmates. To raise the awareness of our existence among the prisoners, the committee organised a 'blitz' whereby all members of the committee visited the prison on one day, talking to as many prisoners as

possible. As a result we have had requests by inmates to meet with us at our last three meetings. The committee hope to keep up this awareness.

Visiting Committee:

Unfortunately there have been three chairpersons of the visiting committee this year due to two members retiring. We also had the committee reduced to four members, due also to retirements. This made the running of the visiting committee very difficult and we are glad to welcome the newly appointed members to the board.

We would like to thank the voluntary bodies that assist in the prison, namely Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Legion of Mary, Society of St Vincent de Paul and The Samaritans.

Rehabilitation:

A GP visits the prison on a daily basis. Although there is a psychologist attached to the prison, there is enough work for two psychologists. There is also a drug counsellor, chaplains and linkage workers in attendance. The prison liaises with Probation Staff daily.

Conclusion:

We are pleased to submit this report. St Patrick's is run by a very professional Governor and Staff, whose welfare of the prisoners is of primary concern.

We wish to thank Governor Quigley, Deputy Governor Hughes, Deputy Governor Bracken, Assistant Governor O'Connor, and the

committee secretary Mr Simon Walsh, for their courtesy, co-operation and availability to the committee at all times.

In view of the overcrowding and lack of transfers of inmates to other institutions, we would ask the Minister to consider a 'step down' facility, which may be able to accommodate up to forty prisoners.

We have highlighted some of the issues that we feel need attention. We look forward to working in the coming year with the Prison staff, the prisoners, the Irish Prison Service and the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Mr Dermot Ahern.

The Visiting Committee members are committed to fulfilling our function.

Gerard Walsh
Chairman