

Portlaoise Prison
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Mr. Dermot Ahern, T.D.,
Minister for Justice, Equality & Law Reform,
94 St. Stephen's Green,
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Visiting Committee Annual Report 2009

We, the members of the Visiting Committee at Portlaoise Prison are pleased to present our Annual Report for the year ending 31st December, 2009.

The Committee met on the first Tuesday of each month throughout the year and two members of the Committee visited the Prison on an unannounced visit once a month. Each month members of the Committee visited different areas of the Prison and inspected all facilities available to prisoners.

The Committee met with a large number of prisoners throughout the year who had a varied list of requests and issues. The Committee raised each issue with the Governor and made some recommendations regarding same and they were satisfied with the outcome or action taken on each occasion. The Committee would like to highlight the fact that an increasing number of requests were made by prisoners who had been transferred to the new state of the art C Block and were looking to go back to Mountjoy Prison.

Throughout the year, the Committee visited the new C Block during different stages of its progress and are delighted to report that this new Block which was officially opened on 23rd November, 2009 by Minister Dermot Ahern is a very modern building with in cell sanitation and provides a wide range of workshops and education facilities for offenders housed in this Block.

We are happy to report that all prisoners have access to a very good health care system which includes a full time Medical Officer, who along with the Nurse Officers and Medical Orderlies provide excellent care for all the prisoners. A Physiotherapist from the local hospital visits the Prison on a weekly basis and a visiting Psychologist also attends at the Prison on a regular basis. The following clinics are also provided on a regular basis or as required : Psychiatrist, Dentist, Chiropodist and Optician.

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

The Prison also has a full time Probation Officer who addresses a wide range of issues with the prisoners such as offending behaviour, anger management, addiction, coping skills, problem solving skills and resettlement issues. Most of the work is carried out on an individual basis but some group work programmes also took place during the year. Some prisoners also requested help with sourcing accommodation, social welfare and employment in preparation for their release throughout the year.

The Education Centre offers prisoners a wide range of subjects at basic, intermediate and advanced levels. The Education Centre held a number of examinations by accredited bodies during the year and a number of prisoners sat these exams. A number of pre release courses were also offered during the year which include courses in Goal Setting, Personal Development, Relationships and Job preparation.

The Industrial Supervisor in charge of the Kitchen and his team of Assistant Industrial Supervisors continue to produce and maintain very high standards in the preparation, cooking and distribution of food on a daily basis. The 28 day menu caters for both normal and vegetarian diet. Prisoners working in this area must take part in a number of certifiable training courses which assists them in the performance of their work and helps them maintain an interest in their work.

Once again, we congratulate the Governor and his staff in this area on their achievements in receiving the Q mark and the Taoiseach's Award for excellence in catering.

We would like to thank the Director General, Mr Brian Purcell and Directors Connolly and McCaffrey for meeting with us and providing us with a very detailed and informative account of the activities of the Prison service throughout the year and also for allowing us the opportunity to have a questions/answers session with them.

In conclusion, we would like to thank Governor Whelan, his management team and staff for the courtesy, assistance and hospitality provided to us on our visits to the Prison at all times during the year.

Tom Colgan
Chairman

Anne Turley

Eilish Croke

Michael Hough

Susan Meagher

William Foley

Tim Long