

St. Patricks Institution Annual Report 2009

We the members of the visiting Committee of St. Patricks institution are pleased to submit our annual report for 2009 to Mr Dermot Ahearn Minister for Justice Equality and Law Reform.

The Visiting Committee met Monthly in St. Patricks and also carried out some 45 random unannounced visits during the year. According to submitted written reports the Visiting Committee are satisfied that they found the prison was being run in an efficient, fair, safe, and a humanitarian way. The Committee are satisfied that this is always the case.

As in previous years, we wish to place on record that from our observations, in this institution the welfare of the inmates is of primary concern to all staff. We wish to record our thanks and appreciation to the Governor and his staff for the excellent management and running of the Institution.

During 2009 a number of positive developments took place among those the most important being the upgrading of the sound system in the visiting areas and the continued development of the workshops.

A highlight for the Visiting Committee during 2009 was a very enlightening visit to Hydebank Prison in the North of Ireland of which the highlights were: Control of the total budget, Visiting Facilities, Relaxed atmosphere, No isolation, Computer visiting system, and Parents support group.

Accommodation

The logistics of managing accommodation in St. Patricks gets more complicated each year. This is caused by the increased numbers being remanded to the prison and the increased threats of violence from the different factions in the prison. This situation is regularly discussed with the Governor at monthly meetings and the Committee have been assured that the staffs are managing this difficult situation with the safety of all inmates as a priority.

Kitchen

The kitchen in St. Patrick's is operated to the highest standards in hygiene and service. Food continues to be prepared in an efficient manner by a very professional staff, and members of the prison population are also employed in the kitchen. Congratulations are due to all concerned on achieving a Q Mark for 2009.

Gym

There are four Gymnasia in St Patrick's. They are well attended by the inmates and are supervised by Prison staff who is NCEF qualified. There was some confusion with replacement of exercise equipment this year this was found to be a paper trail problem and the issue was sorted out satisfactorily.

Education

The school, under the stewardship of Mr. Tom Duffy, Principal continues to provide a high standard of education and a broad range of services in a comfortable and learning environment for the inmates. Subjects offered in the school range from basic Literacy skills to preparation for State Examinations (Junior Cert and Leaving Cert) to 3rd Level FETAC modules. Between 30 and 40 inmates sat the Junior Certificate Examination in June 2009, while 4 inmates sat the Leaving Cert in 2009. FETAC modules to Level 5 are offered to the inmates in St. Patrick's.

The committee are pleased to report that the classes (Art, Literacy – English) are continuing to be offered to the inmates on Protection. The

carpentry / woodwork class which was introduced last year is successful in the new school. Inmates in the Special Unit continue to participate in Maths, Literacy, CSPE and Art Classes. An excellent range of 6-8 week courses (FETAC) are available to the inmates also.

The school will participate and implement a new scheme entitled "Linkage Soft Skills Modules" in 2010 which covers subject areas such as Preparation for Work, Communication skills etc. The visiting Committee in St. Patrick's Institution encourage and urge continuing funding and provision of materials for the school in order to maintain the high standards in the school.

Library

The Library is made available to inmates at the times the other facilities i.e. workshops and schools are available. The stocking of the Library is of books of interest to the inmates with newspapers and some magazines available. There are also computers available for inmates to work with. The management regularly bring in outside people to demonstrate different unusual topics. This is to create interest in activities that may be of interest to them in the future.

Workshops

The following Courses offer qualifications in City and Guilds.

Metal Work, Woodwork, Kitchen, Kitchen Training

Painting and Decorating

Industrial Cleaning B.O.S.C. (British Industrial Cleaning Society)

Laundry Guild of Cleaners and Launderers, Computers pre E.C.D.L.

Woodwork can also obtain an extra qualification from the Scottish Qualification Society.

The inmates take on many projects for instance they supply finished product to Make a Wish Foundation, Temple St. Children's Hospital, Scouts, and a number of football teams of inner city children. Some of these workshops would have an average of 10 people participating each day.

There are some issues of staffing due the financial restrictions at present in place. One workshop had to close temporarily because the Officer in charge had to do prison escort duties. The workshops are very successful

and there is a great sense of camaraderie amongst the participants who seem very motivated to succeed in any projects they take on.

Visiting Facilities and Screens

Visiting Areas:

This has long been a contentious issue among inmates. It is two years since the poor installation of the sound system and the security screens. We are happy to report this has finally been rectified. Visitors and inmates can now have a conversation at normal sound level.

The Visiting Centre:

Visitor Reception: The committee would like to see the restoration of crèche facilities in this area. This was necessary because of the Swine Flu epidemics and will be restored as soon as that threat is finished. A lot of the inmates of St Pat's have very young family members. In an ideal world this would provide an opportunity for staff to interact with inmates children and other family members.

C3:

This wing continues to cause concern to the committee. It is wrong that prisoners who are put on protection are cell by cell with prisoners who are in that wing as punishment. With the ever increasing number of gangs, the situation is becoming unmanageable. We realise this situation prevails in other prisons also. We urge the IPS to form a manageable, coherent strategy.

Special Cells and Sex Offenders

Due to the nature of their crimes and the constant threat which exists from other inmates it is necessary to keep a small number of inmates separate from the general population of prisoners at all times. Whilst the Committee fully understand the need for prison management to take every precaution in protecting these individuals at all times, each and every prisoner in their care is entitled to the supports available in the

prison. We are concerned about the level of restriction this protection imposes on this small group of prisoners.

We continuously discuss this with the Governor and are aware of the efforts made to ensure these prisoners have similar education and skills development opportunities as all other prisoners. We call on the Department to ensure that management are provided with sufficient resources to meet the rehabilitation needs (education and skills development) of these prisoners.

Inmates meeting with the Committee

The number of prisoners who came to see the Committee this year was 6. At all times the Committee try to make the visitor welcome and at ease, this can be difficult as the Committee usually numbers 8 to 10 persons. It can be intimidating for the young inmates but as Committee members visit on their routine visits they meet the inmates in a more informal environment. All discussions during these visits are absolutely confidential and where possible feedback is given to the individual through a Governor as soon as possible certainly within 24 hours.

Complaint Forms

The Complaint forms register is inspected routinely during the year, and relevant notice is taken. There were 44 Complaint forms requested and 19 submitted the committee will investigate if all complainants are able to complete the form.

Special Observation Cells

The log book which is maintained for the special observation cells was inspected. It is noted that there were 22 entries during the year and that it is a lot of the same people ending up in these cells. The monitoring of the inmates in these cells is of vital importance and the need for proper medical and psychological management is a must. This is a priority for the Committee members as some of the inmates are very vulnerable. We have confidence that the staff share our concerns in this regard,

Cleanliness throughout the Prison

In general the prison is presented in a clean and tidy state. There are however concerns about the state of some of the toilet facilities used by the prisoners. This can be very frustrating for staff as it should be up to the inmates to maintain the toilet areas in a hygienic state. There was a Cleaning Workshop which because of lack of a qualified instructor had ceased functioning, this has now been rectified and the workshop is back in operation with one of its target areas the upkeep of the public toilet

areas. In general though, the Committee are satisfied with the overall standard of cleanliness throughout the prison.

Death and Injury

While there were a few outbreaks of violence during the year when Prison Officers were injured all injured officers returned to work after appropriate care. The Committee are satisfied that all incidents are properly investigated and there has been an increase in the use of closed circuit monitoring units.

Family Support Group

Following a visit of the Committee to Hydebank in the North of Ireland last year the committee decided to look at setting up a family support group to facilitate members of families to communicate together and discuss issues and problems of mutual interest.

Progress has been made in that we have identified some Parents who are interested in participating in the project. The intention is to have a meeting of the participants in the institution as soon as this is possible. It is important that a genuine cross section of parents are available and that these have a genuine interest in improving the cooperation between inmates and prison staff.

Challenges for the Committee

On several occasions during the year the Committee felt that the press coverage of conditions in the prison was unfair. St Patrick's is an old prison and because of this requires more maintenance than a more modern building. In these times of tight monetary controls it can be difficult to manage a budget to meet all the requirements of the prison. The Committee would point out that these prisoners are short term and young and need to be in a facility that encourages rehabilitation and self-respect. The staff endeavours to manage the facility with the resources available.

Meetings of Chairpersons of Prison Visiting Committees

On behalf of the Visiting Committee of St Patricks, the Chairperson attended a number of meetings of Chairpersons of all the prisons. These meetings are useful as they offer the opportunity to the chairpersons to compare notes on the activities of the committees as well as discuss policy and responsibilities of committees. One of major developments during 2009 was the development of a manual for Visiting Committees as well

as a document setting out a training schedule for new committee members. This has long been requested by new members and we look forward to the completion of this project in 2010.

Conclusion

We were pleased to submit this report and we are confident that St Patricks continues to be very well managed by a Professional Governor and staff.

We wish to express our thanks for their cooperation to Governor Barclay and Deputy Governors O'Connor and Hughes. A very special thank you to Simon Walsh, our Clerk to the Visiting Committee, and his excellent support of the Committee during the year is much appreciated.

The Visiting Committee members are committed to fulfilling our function in full. We believe there is always room for improvement. We looking in the future to working in close cooperation with the Prison Staff, the inmates, the Irish Prison Service and the Minister for Justice, Equality, and Law Reform

Denis Murphy Chairperson 2009