



HM INSPECTORATE OF PRISONS

HMP LOW MOSS

INSPECTION: 11-12 MARCH 2003

LAST FULL INSPECTION 8-16 FEBRUARY 1998



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

ROLE/CHARTER OF HM INSPECTORATE OF PRISONS FOR SCOTLAND

Section 7 of the Prisons (Scotland) Act 1989, as amended by the Scotland Act 1998, provides the statutory basis for the Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, and in particular the requirement to submit an Annual Report to the Scottish Ministers. This is laid before the Scottish Parliament and published.

It is the duty of the Chief Inspector to inspect or arrange for the inspection of prisons in Scotland and to report to the Scottish Ministers on them. Each of Scotland's 16 penal establishments currently receives a full formal inspection, on a cyclical basis, every 3¹/₂-4 years. Full inspections take between a week and a fortnight depending on the size and complexity of the establishment, during which all aspects of the establishment are examined from the point of view of safety, decency, and the establishment's contribution to crime prevention. Security, discipline, control and efficiency are also examined. The Inspectorate also takes account of requirements, policies and concepts applying to the Scottish Prison Service.

Inspection reports aim to give a balanced account of conditions in the establishment, reflecting good practice and areas for improvement, as they are found.

When completed, the reports are sent directly to Scottish Ministers and are not subject to negotiation with Governors or the Scottish Prison Service. In due course, a Ministerial response is normally published along with the report. The Chief Inspector has no executive powers but is able to draw Ministers' attention to any aspects of a penal establishment which call for comment, whilst the publicity which the Chief Inspector's reports attract can be an instrument for change.

Full inspection reports are followed up in subsequent years by intermediate inspections, and these are sent to the Governor and to the Chief Executive of the Scottish Prison Service. The Inspectorate also undertakes occasional studies on a theme common to all or several penal establishments.

The Chief Inspector receives professional support from 2 senior Governors from the Scottish Prison Service who are seconded to the posts of Deputy Chief Inspector and Inspector. A Scottish Executive civil servant completes the main Inspectorate team. A number of lay consultants and researchers also contribute to the inspection process.

The Inspectorate is also responsible for inspecting legalised police cells which are used to hold prisoners awaiting trial locally in isolated areas or, following conviction, pending transfer to a main prison. Inspections are carried out every 3 years, with reports being submitted to the Scottish Ministers sent to all Chief Constables concerned and published.

The Chief Inspector is not an Ombudsman and cannot deal with individual complaints by prisoners or staff. But groups of prisoners and groups of staff are interviewed during each formal inspection, their general views are recorded, and may form a basis for recommendations or suggestions for improvement.

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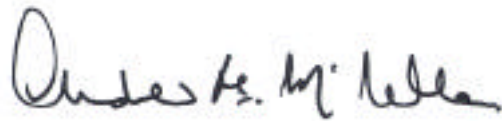
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The visit to Low Moss was made as part of a programme to visit every prison each year in which a full inspection is not being made. In the course of such visits the purpose is to follow up points of note from previous inspections, to examine any significant changes, and to explore issues arising from the establishment's own assessment of itself. It should not be seen as an attempt to inspect the whole life of the establishment.

1.2 The Inspection Team comprised:

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May 2003

ANDREW R C McLELLAN
HM CHIEF INSPECTOR OF PRISONS

2. PREAMBLE

2.1 One dormitory at Low Moss has been converted into cell accommodation, with two people in each cell. The project was managed by Low Moss itself, and the cost was not nearly as high as might have been anticipated. The improvements in atmosphere, decency, privacy, cleanliness and safety are immediately obvious.

2.2 Within the last year other building work has been taking place. Maintenance and repair to Davidson House, an improved staff facility and a risk and needs assessment centre, all contribute to a sense of development and progress. This building work is important in two ways. Firstly because it is a sign to staff and prisoners alike that Low Moss is not choosing to lie down and do nothing in the face of closure which might be as much as three or four years away. Secondly because buildings have a particular significance at Low Moss: its unique dormitory accommodation, frequently criticised in previous HMCIP reports, has greatly influenced so much of what happens there.

2.3 If Low Moss were to be described as an “old-fashioned” prison that would refer to the accommodation. But it might also refer to some of the relationships between staff and prisoners: perhaps the dormitory arrangements makes it more difficult for staff to engage closely with the lives of prisoners. It might refer to some of the work which is available: stripping cables may be popular with prisoners but it is not useful kind of work either in terms of building self-respect or in creating employability. And “old-fashioned” would be one way of describing a prison which has such inflexible arrangements about prisoners clothing and requires prisoners to take such clean underwear as might fit from a random heap each day.

2.4 This report does not attempt any serious examination of drugs in Low Moss: yet it is clear from any conversation with prisoners or staff that much of the life of the prison, from health care to visits, is dominated by drug issues. This is not surprising in a prison where most sentences are short. Nor is it surprising that it is difficult to sense any real progression through the sentences. There is much discussion about the efficacy of short sentences: Low Moss demonstrates how hard it is even for committed and imaginative prison staff to offer in a few weeks the sort of challenges and support which would be needed if imprisonment were to help prisoners change their lives.

3. ASSESSMENT

Safety

Violence

3.1 There had been 13 serious prisoner on prisoner assaults from the beginning of April 2002 to the time of inspection. Ten of these were serious enough to warrant classification against a Key Performance Indicator. The target was five. There was one prisoner on staff assault in this period although this was not classed as a KPI. Although Low Moss has a recent history of disturbance there had been no major incidents in the last five months.

Bullying

3.2 The anti-bullying strategy does not appear to be working. Incidents of bullying are dealt with on a 'one-off' basis with the victim normally being returned to his sending prison. SPS's usual approach is to target the perpetrator rather than the victim, and the position at Low Moss reflects the difficulty of managing bullying in dormitories. The anti-bullying strategy requires to be re-visited as a matter of some urgency.

Addictions/MDT

3.3 The MDT Unit has two full time posts. Thirty staff have been trained and fill these posts on a rotational basis. The Unit carries out tests Monday to Friday only, and although monthly testing targets are now being met this has not always been the case. There is little suspicion testing carried out.

3.4 The Low Moss KPI target for negative MDT returns is 78% with the figure standing at 67% at time of inspection.

3.5 A detoxification programme is in place, dealing with the physical aspects of addiction. However, this is not accompanied by any structured follow up support. Given the fact that prisoners on detoxification remain in their dormitory during this period, an opportunity exists to carry out some group work then.

3.6 Although there is extensive assessment of drug users, there is little on offer by way of interventions, apart from the 21 hour drug awareness course. While no one at Low Moss underestimates the extent of drug use among the population, considerable thought needs to be given to the best way to support a relatively young, drug taking population (at time of inspection 218 prisoners from a total of 294 were under 35 – see paragraph 3.9 for a breakdown of age groups).

Self Harm

3.7 In the past year, 11 prisoners have been subject to ACT. These prisoners are now managed within the prison, with only extremely serious cases being returned to closed conditions. Of the 11, three had had to be returned to closed conditions. There is no Listener Scheme in place. In the past year there have been no deaths in custody, no suicides or attempted suicides and no instances of self harm.

Security

3.8 Neither the Rapiscan machine or the metal detector in the visits room were being used and this has implications for levels of security there, and for levels of security and safety within the prison itself.

Decency

Accommodation

3.9 The design capacity for Low Moss is for 343 short term, medium to low supervision prisoners, although a ceiling of 307 had been agreed between the establishment and headquarters as a manageable number. At the time of inspection the prisoner population was 294 and around three quarters of these were serving a sentence of 12 months or less. A breakdown of sentences being served was:-

Sentence	Numbers
Over 36 months	4
Over 24 months up to 36 months	11
Over 18 months up to 24 months	17

Over 12 months up to 18 months	39
Over 6 months up to 12 months	109
Over 3 months up to 6 months	88
Three months and under	26

A breakdown of age was:

Age	Numbers
Up to 25	92
26 to 35	126
36 to 45	57
46 +	19

3.10 The prison is of wooden, single storey construction, and the accommodation comprises 11 dormitory-style units linked by internal corridors and Davidson House, a temporary, pre-fabricated building. The corridors linking the dormitories are narrow and do not permit good access. Some investment has taken place, with the partial refurbishment of seven dormitories. The available accommodation is sparse and offers little privacy. However, prisoners have access to limited toilet and washing facilities 24 hours per day. Each dormitory has a communal area providing seating, television, pool table and a small electronic games facility. Hot drink and utensil washing facilities are available in all areas. This accommodation is obviously sub-standard, and that has been recognised and acknowledged by all who are familiar with the establishment.

3.11 The refurbishment dormitory 5 is bright and quiet. Two person rooms have been built for 22 prisoners and these offer much greater privacy and security than the dormitories. The rooms are small but comfortable, with a small work desk, and television. The communal area is well equipped with a pool table, lounge chairs and communal seating. The toilet and shower facilities have been refurbished to a high standard. Management is to be commended for this imaginative and relatively inexpensive initiative.

3.12 The separate cell area was clean. Cells are of a recognised standard of construction but do not have raised beds. A person located in a separate cell is required to sleep on a mattress on the floor. A bed constructed and secured to an appropriate standard should be considered.

Association and Exercise

3.13 Access to exercise was not a problem, although association appears to be confined to socialising within the dormitory where pool, TV, books, newspapers, electronic games and radio are available. Inter-dormitory association is also available on request. This makes for a very noisy atmosphere with little privacy.

3.14 A common complaint was access to telephones. There are eight telephones for the dormitory area, all located at a central point. A further two telephones are located within Davidson House. Staff call small groups from the various dormitories in turn, and prisoners complain about the lack of any rota and also about the short period of time they have when they do make their call. Access to telephones should be reviewed.

Clothing

3.15 Despite being medium to low security supervision level, prisoners have less access to personal belongings than at other prisons. They also have no opportunity to wear their own clothing, with the exception of training shoes, which again is at odds with most other prisoners in Scotland.

3.16 HMP Shotts provides the laundry facility for clothing and bedding. The system should ensure that clean clothes are issued in the dormitory area each morning with dirty clothes being collected later that day. In practice, however, the supply of clean clothing was erratic and disorganised. In addition, prisoners do not have 'personalised kit' and the system in place for changing underwear means that they have to take what is available, rather than having their own returned after they had been laundered. While denims could usually be exchanged, some prisoners complained about having to wear the same pair for up to two weeks. Prisoners go to work, associate and go to visits in the same clothes. It was quite obvious from observation that many prisoners were wearing grubby clothes.

3.17 Plans are in place to provide prisoners with fleece type jackets. This is to be commended but if the individuals cannot exchange these garments for clean items it could undermine the positive aspects of this improvement.

3.18 There seems to be no reason, in line with common practice elsewhere in SPS, that prisoners should not wear their own clothing in the evening and at weekends. The laundry system clearly does not work and requires to be reviewed.

Food

3.19 Prisoners dine in a large, bleak, communal dining room. While the surroundings are drab, the food is generally of a high standard, being prepared in the adjacent kitchen and served fresh and hot.

3.20 Unlike most other prisons, Low Moss has no advance menu choice system in place. Prisoners are called up in groups, each group getting a turn at being first, so it is a matter on individual days of 'first come, first served'. SPS Operating Standard 3.63 is not being met. There seems to be no reason that the good quality food could not be enhanced by a choice system.

Visits

3.21 The physical accommodation is good and the new building is clean, bright and comfortable. Twenty visit spaces are available within the main visit area with a further three closed visits. It has a designated tea bar area and a children's play area. However, the tea bar was not in use for hot drinks as no service provider had been identified. The availability of hot drinks and the poor reliability of the visit room vending machines was a major issue with visitors.

3.22 Generally, access to visits was not a problem. Visit sessions are available between Monday and Thursday, with one session in the afternoon and one in the evening. Weekend visits allow four afternoon sessions per day. Even though up to 50% of the available visits were not taken up, in some cases prisoners still had to give one week's notice of a visit. Some flexibility could be introduced which would allow prisoners to book a visit and use the space at short notice.

3.23 While access was not considered to be a problem, both prisoners and visitors complained that the supervision was excessive and overly intrusive. As with much of Low

Moss visits are highly regimented, for example tables and chairs are in rigid lines clearly designed for scrutiny rather than quality of visit. The room has CCTV coverage and good sight lines, and the physical presence of staff close to the visiting group may therefore be counter productive. The holding area for prisoners is inadequate and this was brought to the Governor's attention during the inspection. The visitor's waiting area is comfortable with chairs and open spaces for individuals to stand.

3.24 There is little information available for prisoners regarding important issues such as visit times; availability of public transport; taxi telephone numbers; or guidance regarding the conduct expected of visitors while in the visit room. Neither is there any advice about how to hand in money or how to contact the FCDO within the establishment.

3.25 While a large area for the Family Contact Development Officer is available, little activity appears to be taking place.

Physical Education

3.26 There are three Physical Education Instructors. In addition, six officers are trained for the delivery of some sports and games.

3.27 The current facility is a gymnasium area which includes a small "weights" room and a games hall. The weights room is an adapted residential unit and although well equipped it is cramped and equipment is positioned close together. The decoration is drab and the area is in need of refurbishment.

3.28 The main games hall area is small and allows only limited ball games to take place. "Four-a-side" football is the normal team make up, as the area is not large enough to accommodate the traditional "five-a-side" game with safety. The roof is low and is not suitable for racket games.

3.29 As there are no changing and shower facilities within the area all prisoners are required to return to the residential accommodation for showers after each programme has been completed.

3.30 The allocation of time to prisoners within the gymnasium area is limited. The first class starts 09.00 followed by a further at 10.30. Lunch and exercise periods follow allowing one further afternoon session at 14.45. Evening access is available but is restricted to around twenty individuals with eight spaces being allocated to the enhanced work parties. No access is available to this group during the working day. Access to the gymnasium is restricted to weekdays only as the Physical Education staff are not rostered for weekend duties, and currently the use of six trained sports and games officers does not occur regularly. The prisoner age profile indicates that over two hundred are in the age group of twenty-one to thirty-five years old and the lack of access to physical exercise, team games and general opportunity for physical education is not conducive to good order.

Relationships

3.31 Low Moss is a very regimented environment where much emphasis is put on overt control. While relationships varied, there was a reasonable degree of courtesy and respect shown. Prisoners and staff both reflected that relationships were much less confrontational than they had been in the past, and prisoners suggested that Low Moss was an “easy” place to serve a sentence because staff left them very much to their own devices. There was no evidence that staff regularly spent time in the dormitories, and despite the fact that Low Moss has a number of prisoners serving over two years, no record of routine involvement is kept - it is common practice elsewhere to have some form of Hall Record. The prison intends to pilot the SPS Short Term Prisoner Management System. This is to be encouraged.

Race Relations

3.32 Low Moss has a Race Relations policy in place. There had been one complaint of a racial incident and the accompanying paperwork suggests that the matter was dealt with sensitively and appropriately.

Reducing Offending

Induction

3.33 Induction takes place within the residential areas, although in practice little by way of structured activity takes place and prisoners find out from others what they are entitled to and

how the prison operates. While there is evidence that prisoners see Chaplains and the Social Worker, this appears to be relatively disjointed. Those who use drugs are seen by Cranstoun Drug Services for assessment and referral to local interventions or to other agencies but again there does not appear to be a structure around this. All prisoners are initially seen by the Labour Allocation Board, but this appears to take little account of individual needs or skills.

3.34 Management are currently developing a Risk and Needs Assessment Centre which all admissions will attend, and this should improve the current position.

Assessment

3.35 Cranstoun Drug Services see most prisoners who have identified drug misuse as part of their history. The unit has a team leader plus three workers, (but is currently short of one worker). Staff retention has been a problem, and with the most experienced worker about to leave this reflects a 100% turnover since the contract started.

3.36 Given the high turnaround of the prisoner population, Cranstoun do not see every admission and at the time of inspection there was a waiting list of 80 prisoners. This appeared to be the norm. After assessment, there is relatively little on offer.

Throughcare

3.37 The prison has an imaginative 'Low Moss Prison Partnership Forum' which brings together the agencies and providers who work in and with the prison. Eighteen external agencies are represented which is impressive. Low Moss has a Throughcare Chaplain, the first such post in the SPS. Some 13 different services are advertised to prisoners via a Throughcare Centre leaflet. Both the Addictions Nurse and Cranstoun refer prisoners to partner agencies and there is a potential here for overlap.

Programmes

3.38 The Programmes Unit complement is three staff on early shift and one on late shift. The Staff Attendance System limits the time prisoners can undertake programmes, particularly in the afternoon.

3.39 Low Moss runs the SPS Cognitive Skills and 21-Hour Drug Awareness Courses. Plans are underway to introduce the SPS Alcohol Awareness Course. Given that around one third of prisoners are not serving a sentence long enough to access the cognitive skills course, some thought should be given to other, more appropriate courses. The provision of courses should be driven by prisoner need.

Social Work

3.40 One Social Worker covered the needs of the prison, and given the nature of the prison his role was primarily the provision of more traditional 'welfare' work, with a minimum of statutory input. The work included advice and help with accommodation and welfare benefits on release. It also involved an element of counselling for prisoners struggling with their sentence and dealing with relationship problems. The Social Worker sits on the labour allocation board, held each morning in the Admission Dormitory, to ensure he is aware of all prisoners and potential issues at that early stage.

Work

3.41 Every prisoner is allocated a job. The main opportunities are catering, joiners, textiles, salvage, VT cleaners and general cleaning posts.

3.42 Most prisoners serving very short sentences are allocated to the salvage party. This work party is extremely popular in the summer months as work takes place in the open air.

3.43 The textiles workshop offers training in the operation of industrial sewing machines. Although there is limited work of this nature in the community it is encouraging to note that individuals are given responsibility for Quality Control; measuring and cutting of raw material; and the repair and maintenance of machinery. The textile workshop is a positive working environment and was producing finished products of a high standard.

3.44 The joiners is also an active work party and individuals appeared interested and willing to work without staff intervention. Contract work is available. This party is an

‘enhanced’ party allowing individuals to earn more depending on the performance of the overall unit.

3.45 The VT cleaners has an accredited programme which all cleaners and passmen undertake. However, at the time of inspection, they did not have a permanent location for their core party of between four and eight prisoners and this was impacting on its effectiveness.

3.46 Managers responsible for the industries complex and overall employment opportunities within the establishment were keen to emphasise improvements planned for the near future. These include accredited training within the textiles area.

Education

3.47 The education provider, Motherwell College is committed by Contract to deliver 13,000 learning hours, and was on target to meet this.

3.48 The Learning Centre receives referrals for educational intervention from various sources within the establishment: through the basic skills assessment conducted shortly after admission; by Residential Staff; by Cranston Drug Services; or they can self refer.

3.49 The learning environment itself was vibrant and appeared to have a good learning ethos. Space was limited but had been effectively utilised to provide space for eleven computer terminals, a kitchen, main classroom and a small area with further IT equipment. The maximum the centre can accommodate at any one time is twenty individuals. Fifty percent of individuals presenting themselves for education were below entry level 1. Courses available were Intermediate Level 1 Core Skills in Information Technology, Art, Healthy Eating, Health and Safety, and the basics in reading, writing and mathematics. Future plans to enhance the educational programme include the development of parenting skills and linking education requirements to prison industries.