



HMIPS
HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland
INSPECTING AND MONITORING

News Release
Inspection of HMP Dumfries

HMP Dumfries was a well-run prison which performed well against all our standards. It is also highly commendable that in our pre-inspection survey, prisoners in HMP Dumfries were significantly more positive in their assessment of how they were being treated in comparison with the results from other Scottish prisons.

Staff were courteous and professional with a caring and compassionate attitude to prisoners. Action to identify and support those most vulnerable or at risk was particularly impressive. For example, the prison had helped reintegrate prisoners whose behaviour had been very challenging in other prisons.

The most outstanding feature, after the staff, was the Wellbeing Gardens, which were of exceptional quality and well beyond anything inspectors had seen in any other closed prison establishments. The gardens were well used by the prison with various recovery and wellbeing activities running, with prisoners who appreciated its relaxing therapeutic environment. Family events had also been there over the summer, and a local community dementia support group enjoyed access to the gardens. The excellent array of vegetables grown in the gardens were used in the kitchens and life skills classroom, and there were plans to see if local food banks could benefit from any surplus crops.

The prison was spotlessly clean and generally well maintained. Allowing prisoners to paint their own cells promoted a sense of pride, which supported a good level of cosmetic appearance. Nevertheless, with buildings dating back to Victorian times it is inevitable that some elements were showing their age.

HMP Dumfries had effective practices in place to provide a safe environment for those who worked and lived there, although CCTV coverage needed to improve in some areas. It had a good system for completing mandatory drug testing, but backlogs with progression-related drug testing need addressed. Rub down searches were sometimes missed due to not having a staff member of the appropriate gender available.

In general, prisoners had good access to the main regime and, pleasingly, more time out of cell than we see in many other prisons. However, the regime for non-offence protection prisoners was limited. We recognise the challenges around providing equity of regime for a small number of prisoners, but this should still be reviewed.

The employment opportunities were of good quality and were sufficient for all prisoners who were eligible for work. Unfortunately, vocational training, including employability certificates, had been suspended. This prevented prisoners, particularly short-term prisoners, from achieving certification for skills and knowledge relevant to the community on their release.

Educational opportunities were available to all prisoners, and classroom activities were delivered well and engaged those who attended. There was a limited range of subjects on offer, however, and attendance rates were generally low with relatively few qualifications offered or taken up.

Prisoners had good access to well-equipped fitness and sporting facilities, including outdoor sports within the prison grounds. New initiatives were planned to engage prisoners in health and fitness activities. Unfortunately, no prisoners had gained

recognised qualifications or awards for health and fitness activities in the past year.

The Chaplaincy Team were visible throughout the establishment and involved in many support groups within the prison. The visits area was bright with a well-stocked children's play area and staff were welcoming to visitors, but consideration should be given to reintroducing evening visits.

The prison did not deliver rehabilitative programmes which, considering the offence-related status of most of the prisoners, was disappointing and a source of frustration for prisoners and staff. Psychological support was only provided one day per week on site and the lead psychologist attended case conferences remotely, which was also not ideal. Nevertheless, strong partnership working between prison and social work staff ensured that planning for release and reintegration into the community operated effectively.

Our 2015 and 2020 inspection reports had criticised the prison's efforts at promoting Equality and Diversity (E&D), so it was pleasing to see tangible progress with a new E&D strategy and action plan in place. However, access to information in foreign languages still needs to improve, with some foreign nationals unclear on aspects of prison life, although it was encouraging to see prisoners now represented on the E&D Committee.

A number of strong relationships had been developed with partners in both the justice sector and the community. The Healthcare Team were also well integrated alongside their SPS colleagues, supporting effective healthcare delivery.

Overall, this is a very positive inspection report, which is a credit to management and staff.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Interim HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, Stephen Sandham was appointed in August 2024.
2. On publication the report can be found at www.prisonssinspectoratescotland.gov.uk
3. For further information please contact Kerry Love, at Kerry.Love@gov.scot or on 07939 980452.

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