



HMIPS
HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland
INSPECTING AND MONITORING

PRESS RELEASE

HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland publishes inspection report on HMP Kilmarnock

Date: 20 May 2026

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland (HMIPS) has today published its report on a full inspection of **HMP Kilmarnock**, carried out between **19 and 23 May 2025**. The inspection was conducted in partnership with Health Improvement Scotland (HIS), the Care Inspectorate (CI) and HM Inspectorate of Education in Scotland (HMIE).

This inspection marked a significant milestone for the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) as the **first inspection of a prison in Scotland to transfer from private to public sector operation**. Inspectors acknowledged that the transition from Serco to the SPS was completed safely, with **no prisoner unrest**, and this is a credit to all involved.

HMP Kilmarnock was designed to operate with a population of around **500 prisoners**. Shortly after its transfer to the public sector, it was required to accommodate **up to 157 additional prisoners**. HMIPS recognises the broader pressures on the Scottish prison estate, but notes that this increase occurred before SPS systems had time to embed. **223 cells designed for single occupancy had been converted to double occupancy**, which fell below international minimum space standards, albeit marginally. On **22 May 2025, 38 of these cells were being shared by convicted and remand prisoners**, contrary to the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules).

Performance against all **nine HMIPS standards** was assessed as **"Generally Acceptable"**, representing a decline from the previous inspection in **October 2021**, when four standards were rated satisfactory.

Inspectors found that many positive elements from the prison's previous operation remained in place. **Relationships between staff and prisoners were consistently respectful and constructive**, contributing to stability and helping to minimise violence. The Intelligence Management Unit shared information effectively to manage risk. Disciplinary hearings were observed to be **person-centred**, allowing prisoners to make representations. There was a **positive approach to work, education and physical activity**. Remand and convicted prisoners had equal access to activities, employment opportunities were suitable for the size of the prison, and wages remained at pre-transfer levels, encouraging engagement.

Education and gym programmes were well structured, including provision for those held in the Separation and Reintegration Unit. Visits for both families and legal agents were operating well. In healthcare, **case conferences for those at risk of suicide and self-harm were of a good standard**, long-term conditions were managed effectively, access to addictions services was timely, and nurses had received improved training in palliative care. Prisoners were able to retain possession of medication in line with community practice.

The report highlights that the transition had brought significant challenges. Communication between staff and partner agencies was affected, partly due to late TUPE information and uncertainty around new roles. Staff movement and rotation led to gaps in clarity over responsibilities, contributing to weaknesses in **cleanliness, hygiene and equipment management**. Equality and Diversity arrangements had regressed since the last inspection, requiring a full reset. Inspectors noted that the prison **may not be meeting its Public Sector Equality Duty**, particularly in relation to foreign national and disabled prisoners. Operational staffing required almost complete recruitment following the transition. While inspectors commended the **scale and quality of training delivered**, further support is required to embed new systems, including the Personal Officer scheme and use of the SPS Prisoner Records System.

Other concerns included:

- Late arriving prisoners not receiving immediate health screening
- The number of people being held in isolation and outwith the segregation unit
- Inconsistent access to time in the fresh air for some prisoners
- A complaints system lacking credibility with prisoners, which is a national issue
- Limited access to library services
- Reduced prisoner consultation and engagement
- Deterioration in some safeguarding and auditing processes

Inspectors also noted widespread dissatisfaction with food quality, with healthier choices limited and procurement changes leading to reduced flexibility and increased waste.

HMIPS identified **84 desired outcomes**, with **15 priority areas** for HMP Kilmarnock, NHS partners and SPS Headquarters. These focus on equality and dignity, safety, healthcare access, cleanliness, food quality, consultation, complaints handling and lawful use of accommodation.

The report concludes that while the transition to public sector operation was achieved safely, **lessons must be learned** to minimise disruption and loss of good practice in any future transfers. Inspectors emphasised the importance of building on the prison's strongest features – particularly positive staff-prisoner relationships and access to purposeful activity – to support meaningful and sustained improvement.

Embargoed until 00:01 on Wednesday 20 May 2026

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

- HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, Sara Snell, was appointed in February 2025.
- The full inspection report for HMP Kilmarnock is available at www.prisonsspectoratescotland.gov.uk
- For further information please contact Kerry Love, Head of Business Management at kerry.love@gov.scot or on 07939 980452.