



HMIPS

HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland
INSPECTING AND MONITORING

PRESS RELEASE

HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland publishes inspection report on HMP Low Moss

Date: 21 July 2026

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland (HMIPS) has today published its report on a full inspection of **HMP Low Moss, carried out between 25 and 31 August 2025**. The inspection was conducted in partnership with Health Improvement Scotland (HIS), the Care Inspectorate (CI) and Education Scotland (ES).

An inspection of HMP Low Moss **has highlighted the far-reaching consequences of overcrowding across Scotland's prison estate**, with pressures affecting prisoner care, rehabilitation, staff wellbeing and the day-to-day operation of the prison.

At the last inspection in 2022 the prison population stood at 828. **On the first day of this inspection, 25 August 2025, it stood at 835 despite two tranches of early releases of short-term prisoners serving four years or less.** The prison, which opened in 2012 with an operational capacity of 784, has accommodated an additional 100 places through the overcrowding of cells.

Inspectors found that **overcrowding was affecting all aspects of prison life**. The dedicated First Night in Custody Unit had been lost to accommodate population pressures, reducing the quality of support available to newly admitted prisoners. Significant management effort was being directed towards finding suitable accommodation for incoming prisoners, but **pressures in the rest of the estate meant Low Moss was receiving prisoners from as far out of their catchment area as Peterhead**.

Population management nationally was increasingly focused on short-term measures, while longer-term rehabilitation goals were being compromised. Prisoners experienced delays in progression through the prison system, with shortages in prison-based social work resources resulting in backlogs of critical risk assessments and programme assessments. **Many prisoners were unable to access the interventions required to support their rehabilitation and progress towards release.**

Staffing pressures were a recurring theme throughout the inspection. The prison relied heavily on overtime, bank shifts and ex-gratia arrangements to maintain agreed staffing levels. Inspectors concluded that this approach was unsustainable and was contributing to staff exhaustion. Within healthcare, four out of five evening shifts relied on bank staff, creating risks to the delivery of safe and effective care.

As resources were prioritised towards ensuring basic entitlements such as meals, visits and access to fresh air, other **important activities were adversely affected**. Access to employment, education, gym sessions, case management work and personal officer support was often limited. The inspection also found that offence-protection prisoners experienced disproportionate barriers to accessing services and opportunities.

Particular concerns were raised about the capacity of the Prison-based Social Work Team, which faced significant workloads and was unable to complete key assessments within expected timescales. **The delays to prisoner progression are unacceptable** and similar concerns have been raised repeatedly in previous inspections.

The inspection also identified opportunities to strengthen education and employability outcomes. While a wide range of quality employment and educational activities were available, participation levels were low and greater emphasis was needed on vocational qualifications that support employment after release.

Prisoner perceptions of staff relationships were a significant area of concern. Survey results showed that only 53% of prisoners reported feeling safe all or most of the time, while just half felt they were treated with respect. A substantial proportion of prisoners reported witnessing or experiencing inappropriate staff behaviour. Inspectors noted examples of excellent staff-prisoner relationships but found that staffing shortages, redeployments and operational pressures often reduced opportunities for meaningful engagement.

Confidence in the prison complaints system remained low, with 86% of prisoners believing it worked poorly. Inspectors welcomed the introduction of a new complaints logging system but concluded that further work was required to improve confidentiality, transparency and trust.

Despite these challenges, the inspection identified a number of strengths. Reception processes were operating effectively, accommodation standards were generally good, and the prison demonstrated a strong commitment to cleanliness and hygiene. Positive developments included therapeutic initiatives, peer support services, family engagement work, recovery programmes and multi-faith support.

Healthcare services demonstrated strong operational leadership and a person-centred approach, although **inspectors noted the significant emotional burden placed on staff responding to the increasing prevalence of illicit substance use.** Since the previous inspection, Low Moss had experienced 15 deaths in custody, attributed to a range of causes including suicide, physical health conditions and substance misuse.

The inspection found effective responses to incidents of violence and welcomed the introduction of body-worn camera trials. However, **inspectors called for a stronger strategic focus on violence prevention, anti-bullying measures and reducing the availability of illicit substances.**

Inspectors identified 70 desired outcomes for improvement and highlighted 13 priority actions. These include improving living conditions, increasing respectful treatment of prisoners, strengthening confidence in the complaints process, expanding access to vocational qualifications, improving access to healthcare and psychological services, reducing delays in social work assessments and rehabilitation programmes, and ensuring sufficient staffing levels to support a safe and rehabilitative environment.

A key strategic recommendation is directed at the Scottish Government and Scottish Prison Service Headquarters: that cells designed for one person should only accommodate a single prisoner, addressing a fundamental issue underlying many of the pressures identified during the inspection.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

- HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, Sara Snell, was appointed in February 2025.
- The full inspection report for HMP Low Moss is available at www.prisoninspectoratescotland.gov.uk

Embargoed until 00:01 on Tuesday 21 July 2026

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