



Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

Prison:

HMP CASTLE HUNTLY

Year (1 April – 31 March):

2024 – 2025

By HM INSPECTORATE OF PRISONS FOR SCOTLAND



Annual Monitoring Figures

		2023-24	2024-25
	Total number of visits	52	52
	Total number of missed weeks	0	1
	Total number of prisoner requests received	7	13
	Total number of IPM hours	177	146

Executive Summary

This annual report summarises the observations made and engagement with prisoners, staff, and management throughout the year, by Independent Prison Monitors (IPMs) against the nine HMIPS inspection and monitoring standards.

Despite being a relatively small team, the IPMs delivered the statutory requirement of a minimum one visit to HMP Castle Huntly per week. There was only one week where this was not achieved, and an additional visit ensured that there were still fifty-two visits conducted during 2024/25.

Once more, there were relatively few prisoner requests received in comparison with closed conditions prisons, but IPMs ensured that they spoke to many prisoners throughout the reporting period to gather information from prisoners on their treatment by staff and the prison conditions. The information below shows that, based on IPM findings over the course of the reporting period, Castle Huntly did well against each of the nine HMIPS standards.

IPMs have traditionally received low numbers of prisoner requests, and this remained the case in 2024/25. IPMs were clear that this was in no small part due to the commendable positive relationships between prisoners and staff that were observed throughout the reporting period. Staff worked well with prisoners to resolve issues quickly together, rather than prisoners feeling the need to make representations to IPMs.

HMP Castle Huntly appeared to IPMs to be a well-run prison, achieving the aim of testing prisoners in the community prior to their release.

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

IPMs monitored the reception process on several occasions and reported a calm and fair process. Not every prisoner returning to the prison from day release is searched and the selection of those to be searched, including for strip searching was random. The relationships between officers and prisoners were good, with friendly conversation and prisoners were treated with respect. Where relevant, late arrivals were provided with a meal.

Prisoners stated that they were optimistic about what Castle Huntly had to offer them.

Standard 2: Decency

IPMs monitored the cleanliness of the prison and consistently reported the prison was clean.

While the overcrowding situation seen in closed condition prisons did not manifest itself to the same extent at Castle Huntly, prisoners were told that at times they would have to share cells. This did not apply to prisoners with relevant medical markers. Prisoners who had to share cells were given the opportunity to choose who they shared with. IPMs felt this was a sensible approach.

Several prisoners raised an issue about mattress quality. IPMs confirmed that mattresses were replaced every three years as part of a rolling programme, hall by hall. Staff confirmed that any mattresses that were deemed unsuitable would be replaced even if this was outwith the replacement programme. IPMs also spoke to the Fire Safety Officer to ask about the policy on bringing bedding into the prison. He said that there was a policy of not allowing own bedding due to fire regulations and the difficulty of checking whether such bedding met the standards. IPMs accepted this.

IPMs monitored the preparation and provision of food at the prison several times and concluded that it was good. Menus were rotated and included healthy options. Prisoners stated satisfaction with the food also. IPMs were also content with the arrangements made to provide Muslim prisoners with food over Ramadan.

The laundry was deemed by IPMs to be a well organised facility.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

IPMs spoke with prisoners about how safe they felt at the prison. None had any concerns about their personal safety and felt relationships were good with the officers, so that they could raise any concerns with them and feel confident they would be listened to and their issues investigated.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

IPMs observed an Orderly Room in process and felt that staff followed the rules of evidence and procedure. Staff were polite and courteous towards the prisoners and showed considerable empathy. IPMs reviewed some Orderly Room reports. These reports were largely down to breaches of licence conditions by prisoners when out on community access. The outcomes ranged from a caution to forfeit of earnings/forfeit of entitlement to withdraw money a certain number of days. Forfeit of recreation also featured. IPMs felt these outcomes seemed fair in relation to the breaches.

IPMs reported that the Separation and Reintegration Unit cells seemed in reasonable condition for people to be segregated in, albeit with a concern about its suitability for someone requiring more regular monitoring e.g. someone under the influence of MORS. This concern related to the staffing of the SRU. IPMs were told that there was not sufficient resource to staff the SRU full time when it was occupied.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection

IPMs noted several interactions between staff and prisoners. Good relationships between staff and prisoners were evident. Staff interacted with prisoners fairly and politely. IPMs discussed this with prisoners over the reporting period, including prisoners who were about to be liberated, and they had no complaints about the way they were treated and felt staff were very helpful and supportive.

IPMs noted that the Prisoner Information Action Committee (PIAC) meetings were taking place and that minutes were made available for prisoners to read. IPMs noted that inclusivity was encouraged, and that no groups of prisoners were excluded from the PIACs which was good.

The prison appeared to be quiet and orderly throughout the reporting period.

Noticeboards around the prison included lots of information for prisoners about meetings, courses, processes and copies of complaint forms, including for the ombudsman.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

IPMs discussed work placements with prisoners and staff. The number of prisoners out on work placements had noticeably increased post-COVID-19, which was encouraging. IPMs were pleased to learn that an officer goes out and monitors the prisoners on work placements and that there had been only positive feedback from placement providers. Staff were also very enthusiastic about the placements.

There were placement roles in several workspaces and locations. These provided a good range for the prisoners depending on what they were interested in or had experience of, such as golf courses, auto shops, fencing and groundworks. IPMs spoke to the officer in charge of placements, who explained that they had been approached by a company looking for workers and which would also lead to a job opportunity on release.

Some prisoners complained to IPMs about their wages being reduced. IPMs looked into the matter and determined that the reduction in wages was happening across the estate in line with SPS policy. Those that received the reduction had been overpaid, and the estate wide initiative was to ensure that all prisoners were paid the same for similar work. IPMs deemed this to be fair.

IPMs monitored the provision of education opportunities and found it to be run well. Prisoners spoke highly of the department that provided courses that would allow prisoners better opportunities upon release. Art classes also were very popular and produced some excellent work to be put forward for the Koestler Awards.

The gym was quite busy throughout the year, with the prisoners carrying out a wide range of activities including pickle ball, boxing, weights, football etc. Prisoners, as in previous years, worked as marshals for the Forfar half marathon which went well. This was welcomed by IPMs as a demonstration of trust.

There was a range of work taking place around the prison throughout the year, including cleaning, gardens, laundry, kitchen.

Standard 7: Transitions from Custody into the Community

Prisoners who IPMs spoke with were very complimentary about the support they had received towards their release. Prisoners also spoke very positively about the Life Skills Centre and the support they were receiving.

IPMs learned that prisoners transferring to Castle Huntly from, for example, Barlinnie where they were already attending a community work placement and unescorted day release (UDR), had to wait some weeks before the Castle Huntly Risk Management Team reviewed their situation to agree the same for their stay at Castle Huntly. IPMs viewed this as a potential inefficiency in the system. Prisoners subject to this situation told IPMs they felt as if it were a downgrade.

IPMs monitored the Independent Living Unit and deemed it to be an excellent facility, popular and well-run. The prisoners who benefitted had the opportunity to visit a supermarket to experience doing a groceries shop, as many prisoners who have been in prison for a while have not seen a lot

of the new technology etc in shops. IPMs felt this sounded like a good experience for prisoners to understand how shops are operating now and helped when they were released. Prisoners and staff alike also spoke highly of the Unit.

IPMs were pleased to hear that groups were available to prisoners, such mental health management, attitudes towards violent behaviour and counselling sessions, all of which IPMs deemed to be useful in preparation for release.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

IPMs welcomed the news that there were ongoing discussions with GeoAmey about taking prisoners to their work placements after medical appointments, so that they did not miss a whole day's work. Senior management reported that the GEOAmey situation, which was reported with concern in the last annual report, seemed to be improving. However, there were still some instances where their reliability was called in to question.

Staffing levels had been an issue in the first half of the reporting period. There had been a lot of staff sickness and at times staff were being drawn from other parts of the establishment to fill in, e.g. placements staff providing cover in the halls. IPMs also heard that staff shortages carried the risk of shutting down the gym during afternoons, as the gym staff were similarly required to cover residential areas. IPMs were pleased to hear, latterly, that the situation improved towards the end of the reporting period, with around five new officers arriving in March 2025.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

IPMs had some concerns in the first half of the reporting period about the support and provision available for diabetic prisoners following conversations with prisoners, NHS staff and senior management. The provision of a dedicated diabetes healthcare staff member was inconsistent over the course of the year because the specialist diabetic nurse had left the prison and not been replaced. IPMs also felt that not all residential staff were fully conversant with diabetic needs. IPMs raised this with the Governor and in the second half of the year IPMs noted that clear efforts were being made to improve support (provision of a 'diabetic pack' including appropriate food, kitchen made aware of diabetes needs, etc.). NHS were also training nurses to be able to hold Diabetic Clinics, etc.

Waiting times for various healthcare services seemed reasonable to IPMs: one week for a face-to-face visit with a GP, and sooner if speaking with a GP on the phone; three months for mental health; three weeks for physiotherapy, three months for podiatry. This appeared to compare favourably with waiting times in the community.

IPMs were pleased to note that the gym had dedicated time put aside for prisoners who were referred there from the NHS.



Key Issues

1. Lower staffing levels having an impact on prisoner access to work placements and the gym.
2. Provision of support to diabetic prisoners.



Encouraging Observations

Prisoner/Staff relationships were consistently observed to be excellent.

The Independent Living Unit was deemed to be an excellent facility.

There was a consistently high number of prisoners licenced to go out on work placements and home leaves.