



HMIPS
HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland
INSPECTING AND MONITORING

News Release
Full Inspection of HMP YOI Polmont

The relatively new senior management team had clearly brought vision, purpose, energy and direction to the prison, with a united staffing team behind them who felt valued and supported.

HMIPS would like to see expedited the removal to secure care of the very small number of children still held in HMP YOI Polmont. HMIPS believes that children should not be held in prison while more therapeutic alternatives are available in Scotland. This move would bring more cells into availability, mitigating to a small degree some of the significant overcrowding concerns held by HMIPS.

Seven of the nine standards inspected were assessed as satisfactory and two as generally acceptable, reflecting a calm, stable, forward-looking prison, with some excellent resources available to the young people and women. The NHS Forth Valley Healthcare Team had made great progress in addressing the issues highlighted in our previous report and are to be highly commended for moving from a poor to satisfactory rating.

The prison was strong at identifying those who had additional needs and ensuring support was provided for them. We identified 34 examples of good practice across the prison including a locally devised First Night Immediate Needs checklist and early referral to support services after core screening. Inspectors were impressed too by the care and compassion demonstrated by staff.

We welcomed a peer-written induction booklet and the effort that had been put into developing pictorial information booklets and display boards, to assist the understanding of foreign nationals and those with literacy and numeracy issues or neuro-divergent backgrounds. The Inclusion Team performed a vital role in trying to ensure that no one is left behind or isolated, and their contribution was widely praised both by inspectors and the young men and women who have benefitted from their support. In addition, we welcomed the use of Restorative Justice to resolve tensions in the establishment. Inspectors observed excellent work being done through Life Skills courses and with outside agencies and third sector providers such as CrossReach and Paws for Progress.

The inspection team saw a commendable record of success in reducing the number of young men needing to be held in the Separation and Reintegration Unit to a minimum, and in supporting their reintegration management plans.

As with any inspection, however, we witnessed several issues that caused us concern. In particular, that the right under the Mandela Rules to an hour's exercise in the fresh air every day was clearly being breached. We recognise that the number of designated enemies that the young men have makes this difficult with only two exercise yards. The SPS must address this by funding the construction of additional exercise areas with outdoor fixed equipment.

Our other significant concern related to body searching and the continued use of routine body searching of women following a visit from family/friends and during cell searches. The potential for re-traumatising those who may have been affected by previous abuse is high. We continue to strongly urge the SPS to use the available technology and move permanently to intelligence-led searching only.

Food came out poorly in our pre inspection survey and inspectors had concerns about portion size and presentation. We urge the Catering Manager to engage directly with the Food Focus Groups and to look at what else can be done to encourage the young men towards healthier eating.

We note the need for better outdoor clothing for use in the winter and the need to replace a significant number of in-cell safes. Although the prison can boast some excellent facilities and activities, the booking system does not work well, leaving some options underutilised. More could be done to ensure opportunities are maximised and the risk of isolation minimised. A greater rotation of work opportunities between the various categories of young men and women would also assist.

While considerable effort was devoted to supporting the needs of the more vulnerable in the establishment, we must also record that the anti-bullying strategy needs reinvigorated to ensure victims are properly supported. Similarly, while witnessing some outstanding examples of compassionate care, we must express concern at the high number of staff who had fallen out of competency around both Talk to Me training and Emergency Response.

We also found a mixed picture around progression; early indication of programme needs and reinvigoration of the personal officer role led to some young men and women being clear on progression processes, while others expressed a lack of understanding of the pathway and criteria for progressing to the Open Estate. We must also record disappointment at the lack of programmes for offence protection young men.

While healthcare had improved dramatically, the NHS and SPS need to work with the court system and others to improve the flow of important patient information, and to ensure that late arrivals into the prison still receive a formal health screening assessment.

At the time of our inspection the prison was preparing for the arrival of more women and the possibility of accommodating adult men. While the prison fully embraced the need to make best use of spare capacity, particularly given the rising prisoner population across the estate, there was an understandable anxiety that such transfers in do not destabilise the existing population or undermine and slow the progress achieved. We endorse the need for a sensitive change management process that does not interfere with the smooth running of a vital national facility for young people and others.

Notwithstanding the concerns highlighted here, some of which are significant, the overriding impression was of a caring, compassionate, dynamic management team and staff group, and a prison that was moving energetically forward and recovering after the pandemic with greater pace than we have seen elsewhere.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, Wendy Sinclair-Gieben was appointed in July 2018.
2. On publication the report can be found at www.prisonsofscotland.gov.uk
3. For further information please contact Kerry Love, Business Manager, at Kerry.Love@gov.scot or on 07939 980452.

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