



**Annual Report of the
Independent Monitoring Board
at
HMP/YOI Brinsford**

**For reporting year
1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021**

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Introductory Sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory Role of the IMB

The Prison Act 1952 requires every prison to be monitored by an independent Board, appointed by the Secretary of State from members of the community in which the prison is situated.

Under the National Monitoring Framework agreed with ministers, the Board is required to:

- satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within its prison, and the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release
- inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom authority has been delegated as it judges appropriate, any concern it has
- report annually to the Secretary of State on how well the prison has met the standards and requirements placed on it and what impact these have on those in its custody.

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively, its members have right of access to every prisoner and every part of the prison, and also to the prison's records.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international human rights treaty designed to strengthen protection for people deprived of their liberty. The protocol recognises that such people are particularly vulnerable and aims to prevent their ill-treatment through establishing a system of visits or inspections to all places of detention. OPCAT requires that States designate a National Preventive Mechanism to carry out visits to places of detention, to monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees and to make recommendations for the prevention of ill-treatment. The Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

2. Description of the establishment

HMP Brinsford is situated north of Wolverhampton, in the West Midlands. It holds both remand and sentenced young men, between 18 and 25 years of age, with a temporary increase to 29-year-olds, to support population pressures. The majority are young adults, with an increasing number of category C adult men.

Prisoners are housed in five two-storey residential blocks, with two wings on each block. Each wing has some single and some double cells. All cells have in-cell sanitation, but shower facilities are provided elsewhere on the wing hub (other than on residential block 5, which has in-cell showers). Some toilet screening is still needed in double cells.

The wing which was the first night centre has been used for other purposes to support the prison during the pandemic. It has been an isolation wing and an area for category D prisoners who were awaiting transfer.

Other residential blocks provide a variety of functions, including support for those prisoners who require extra help in the development and progression unit on residential (Res) 1. The care and separation unit (CSU) is a 16-bed unit in a separate block.

The contract for providing healthcare services is held by Practice Plus Group, formerly Care UK, which has provided a good service throughout the reporting period. GP services are provided on a contract basis, and include an out-of-hours service. Some prisoners have serious mental and behavioural issues, requiring both psychiatric and psychological support, which is provided by the healthcare trust.

The establishment is fully operational and is able to accommodate 577 prisoners when all cells are able to be used. During the reporting period, the numbers in residence fluctuated considerably, for various reasons. Education and training facilities are provided by Novus.

3. Executive summary

3.1 BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

This report presents the findings of the Board for the period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021. For the period prior to the Covid-19 restrictions, our evidence comes from observations made during visits, scrutiny of records and data, informal contact with prisoners and staff, and prisoner applications.

The Covid-19 outbreak has had a continuing impact on the Board's ability to gather information, with normal visits not resuming until May 2021. Some members continued to participate in segregation reviews and others retained contact with the prison via remote monitoring and telephone calls. Inevitably, there is less detail and supporting evidence than usual. Regular information is being collected specifically on the prison's response to the pandemic.

The education contract did not meet the needs of the prison for most of the time but started to improve later in the lockdown, and some in-cell activities commenced, resulting in a considerable number of qualifications being achieved. Before that, Novus failed to deliver any meaningful service to prisoners, who were behind their doors for up to 23 hours a day. The way the contract has been written makes it very hard to challenge.

Before the lockdown, the number of activity places was far too low, which meant that many prisoners were unemployed. When the Covid-19 regime ends, the Board will need to conduct a detailed review of access to education places and the number of courses available, with checks relevant to the needs of the prisoners.

However, similar to last year, the Board has determined that the staff are running a safe prison and that, overall, despite a very restricted regime since March 2020, prisoners are treated fairly. As noted in previous reports, there continue to be ongoing incidents of violence, self-harm and substance misuse, although the Board notes that these are all reducing because of the Covid-19 restrictions limiting time out of cell.

Gang culture remains a problem that causes friction between prisoners, and is often a cause of premeditated violence.

The training and rehabilitation of prisoners were both good prior to March 2020 but were reduced during lockdown, picking up to an acceptable level later in the period.

There remains a problem in relocating prisoners with mental health problems to more suitable treatment centres. Healthcare staff do an excellent job but it takes too long to find a bed elsewhere for those prisoners assessed as requiring one. This has improved during the reporting period, which is a benefit, but the number of prisoners in custody with mental health issues is still too high.

3.2 Main judgements

How safe is the prison?

In the judgement of the Board, Brinsford remains a safe prison, and this is evidenced, particularly during the challenges of lockdown, through the low levels of self-harm and violence. There remains a minority of prisoners who self-harm but credit must go to staff who work really hard with these individuals to improve the situation. The overall level of self-harm has been a priority, and good progress has been made in reducing this. There are a few prisoners who still self-harm, even after the best efforts of staff, and we feel that they often need specialist support in another establishment.

Violent incidents were relatively rare during lockdown but increased a little when things opened up a bit. Gang-related issues make it difficult to place prisoners in the safest location.

How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?

In the context of the current Covid-19 lockdown, the Board considers that prisoners have been treated as fairly and humanely as is possible, despite the severe constraints on their movement and access to family visits and activities. Prisoners have appreciated some additional benefits, such as extra telephone credit and televisions, and understand that the slow progress in the return to the normal regime is not within the local management's control.

How well are prisoners' health and wellbeing needs met?

The Board believes that the healthcare needs of the prisoners are well met by Practice Plus Group. The challenges of the pandemic were handled well and the number of infections was low. Those that were infected were isolated and levels of transmission were low. There was an effective system of bubbles and isolation of new entrants, which was well managed.

How well are prisoners progressed towards successful resettlement?

The deficiencies of rehabilitative work and preparations for release have both been commented on frequently in recent reports. Little has changed and details of these deficiencies can be found in the Board's reports in 2019 and 2020.

Limited face-to-face visiting, socially distanced, has restarted, and Purple Visits were becoming more popular.

3.3 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

1. The information technology (IT) at Brinsford is old and failing, and needs to be updated. Long periods without a working network are potentially dangerous and, even at its best, this makes it difficult for staff to do their jobs well. Investment in a good IT system would improve many outcomes for staff and prisoners.
2. Prisoners held on immigration status are kept far too long before transfer to an immigration removal centre or their home country.

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

1. The fabric of Brinsford is in a poor state and therefore needs a great deal of investment to return it to a reasonable state.
2. There are too few activity places, particularly for those prisoners who are over the age of 21. Every prisoner should have the opportunity to work or have education, and Brinsford is around 100 places short of being able to deliver that.
3. There have been far too many transfers between establishments, particularly during the pandemic, for what appear to be operational reasons; however, when Brinsford staff members feel that a prisoner needs to be moved urgently, it seems to be very difficult to find a place elsewhere. Bringing in a number of prisoners from other establishments makes the gang problem more difficult to manage, although it needs to be understood that these moves have to be in the best interests of the prisoner concerned.
4. When prisoners are recategorised, it is often a long time before they are moved. This was evident when Brinsford had a number of category D prisoners who were frustrated while waiting for a place in an open establishment.
5. The education contract is not fit for purpose. It has always proved very difficult to hold the provider to account, to ensure that the prison gets good education provision. Any new contracts need to be much tighter in what must be provided and how prisons can be compensated for services not provided.
6. The management of prisoner property in the establishment and the transfer of property between establishments continues to cause many problems, including prisoner anger and claims for compensation. A new policy and procedure have been many years in the development stage and need to be implemented urgently.

7.

TO THE GOVERNOR

1. More places are needed in both education and work-based activities. Quicker entry onto courses would make a big difference to our short-sentence prisoners and would provide a better way forward.
2. Visits need to return to pre-pandemic levels as soon as it is safe. Purple Visits have been useful and should be continued for any prisoners who cannot receive face-to-face visits.
3. The key worker scheme needs to be brought back to at least its pre-pandemic levels, and further improved. It was understandably reduced owing to staff shortages. Officers need support and, possibly, further training to get the scheme to work as it should, to support prisoners.

3.4 Progress since the last report

Several areas which were highlighted in the last few annual reports have continued to improve. These include:

- The number and level of prisoners self-harming has reduced but there is still a small number of repeat offenders that are proving difficult to help.
- The level of violence has reduced further, with some good programmes in place to support the perpetrators of violence.
- Mentally unwell prisoners are not waiting as long for transfers to specialist accommodation.

Other issues have not improved or have got worse. These are:

- The education provision is still not delivering the service that we would expect.
- Prisoners' property is still going missing and is the major issue in their complaints.
- The fabric of the prison is still poor. Some painting has been done but considerably more is required to return it to a reasonable standard. Cells are in a particularly poor state.

Evidence Sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

In general, Brinsford has a reasonable record in this area. The senior leadership team continues to strive for higher standards.

4.1 Reception and induction

Prisoners are received at reception, where there is a new body scanner (which seems to have been a success) and are treated well. A new induction leaflet has been produced (translated into various languages), and induction proceeds immediately in reception, or, if this is not possible, on Res 3, the specialist unit. In particular, 'education induction' is carried out here and a 'red band' prisoner has been introduced to help in this process. The Board has not received any complaints in this area, and prisoners questioned have expressed satisfaction.

4.2 Suicide, self-harm and deaths in custody

There have been no suicides in the reporting period but, sadly, there was one death in custody, as a result of a single-blow assault. This resulted in the prosecution of the assailant for manslaughter, for which he received a six-year custodial sentence. The Board is particularly pleased to report that there has been a steady reduction in self-harm in this reporting period. Many of the incidents have been caused by the same prisoners regularly self-harming, with one particular prisoner requiring quite a few visits to hospital. Inserting objects into the body seems to be an increasing trend.

The Samaritans provide excellent support on the telephone for prisoners when they need it.

4.3 Violence

There is support for victims of bullying and violence. Despite one very nasty assault on a member of staff, the number of incidents in this field is declining, as is the number of prisoner-on-prisoner incidents.

4.4 Prisoners with specific vulnerabilities

These prisoners have been very well looked after in the development and progression unit on Res 1 and, when needed, in the healthcare department (see section 6.4).

4.5 Use of force

The use of force through the use of PAVA (synthetic pepper spray) and batons has largely remained the same. Last year, PAVA was drawn 16 times (but actually used nine times), while the figure for this reporting period was 10 (nine), a pleasing reduction. The Board is satisfied that the use of PAVA was justified and fair, and that the quality of the associated paperwork has improved since last year. However, there is still a certain amount to be done in this field.

On the other hand, the use of batons went up slightly, from nine last year (six being actually used) to 18 (two) in the current reporting period. However, given that a baton was actually used only twice this year, it could be said that this represents an improvement as well.

Self-isolation

This has seen quite a considerable increase in the current reporting period, rising from four instances last year to 23 this year, most of these being attributed to association problems. However, closer inspection would suggest that the incidents are now declining, since only eight instances have been recorded in 2021.

6. Substance misuse

The prison is making some progress in preventing drugs from entering the establishment, largely through stronger intelligence, better screening at the gate and photocopying all incoming mail. However, the latter has had a certain disadvantage because prisoners are no longer able to receive coloured pictures from their children (and sometimes the printing is badly done), which can lead to some disgruntlement. On the other hand, there has been a growing trend in the discovery of hooch (home-made alcoholic drink).

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing and food

There are five residential units, with most cells in need of refurbishment, as are many of the other areas. Issues are reported and dealt with, albeit often slowly. Some issues relying on outside contractors – for example, faulty or damaged telephones – are very slow to be dealt with; five telephones need to be ‘in need of repair’ before

the BT technician is called out. Covid-19 has impacted on the speed with which issues have been dealt with.

When we visited, the kitchens appeared to be clean and tidy; the kitchen has a five-star rating from the Food Standards Agency, South Staffordshire. Meals are an important part of the prisoners' day and this has been particularly true during the pandemic, as the collection of food adds to time out of cells.

Only on the enhanced residential unit, Res 5, can prisoners eat communally, and on that unit some seating was observed not to be fit for purpose.

There are five options to choose from at lunch and supper, and a hot option is available at each mealtime; portion size appears adequate. During the pandemic, prisoners were offered 'comfort supplies', which contained a healthy drink with added vitamins, crisps and chocolate.

Cereals, brew packs and milk are available on each serverly at lunchtime and at suppertime, where prisoners collect what they want for breakfast the following day. The issue of breakfast items on the day before they are to be eaten is not ideal, as some prisoners will choose to eat breakfast items in the evening, which results in a long stretch of time without the provision of food, other than from a prisoner's own canteen supplies, before lunch.

Lunch is sometimes served and completed before noon. Further consideration needs to be given to the length of time between meals. Approximately 75% of food is prepared on-site; at weekends, this figure drops down to approximately 50%.

Religious dietary requirements are met, such as the provision of halal food and the use of heated containers during the period of Ramadan. Opportunities to celebrate religious festivals are embraced; for example, treats were made available during Eid.

Lost items continue to be an issue (see section 5.8). There are plans to make use of laundry bags; these will be filled and zipped up by the prisoners, and washed and dried in the laundry bag, which should reduce the number of lost items. However, the allocation of bags per prisoner will need to be considered, in order to allow a sufficient and acceptable number of items to be laundered each week.

5.2 Segregation, special accommodation

There are 16 cells on the CSU, with four of these being anti-ligature cells, the latter being located downstairs, while the CSU office is located upstairs. The communal areas and cells are largely clean and free of graffiti; the latter is quickly removed when it appears. However, the cells are in need of refurbishment.

Compared with the last reporting period, greater use is made, as appropriate, of a period of 'cooling off' in residential units, reducing the need for prisoners to be segregated, as opposed to those of a more serious nature requiring segregation in the CSU. One prisoner was detained on the unit for 52 days (that is, more than 42 days, beyond which the Secretary of State must approve the decision); all correct procedures were followed. During the period of this report, of those prisoners in the CSU, the average percentage of white prisoners was 41%, and of Black, Asian and minority ethnic was 59%. This is a fair reflection of the prison population as a whole.

The unit exercise yard is not particularly welcoming, although there is a covered area which provides some protection from the elements, and the lower wall is painted white, which is an improvement on bare brickwork.

Relationships between staff and prisoners on the unit have been observed to be good or very good. Staff demonstrate a good level of knowledge of those assigned to their care.

Some prisoners receive input from the education staff while segregated, but for most the regime is 'basic' and many prisoners choose not to access education. There is a good range of fiction and non-fiction literature available on the landing. Radios are often not available if a prisoner wants one. Each prisoner has 45 minutes a day for exercise and a shower.

5.3 Staff/prisoner relationships

Staff turnover remains high, which is likely to impact on the quality of care provided to prisoners.

Most of the staff we spoke to demonstrate a good level of knowledge of the prisoners in their care. The staff/prisoner interactions we observe are largely mutually respectful. Limited time out of cells, due to the pandemic, impacted on staff absences and has not helped staff/prisoner relationships.

The key worker programme has not worked at all well for much of this reporting period, owing to the impact of Covid-19 on staffing levels. Key workers have also been redeployed on occasions when there is a shortage of staff for other reasons, such as staff receiving training. There has been a reluctance on the part of some officers to take on the role of key worker as, although they are keen to embrace these duties, they feel that there is not sufficient time to perform the role well, creating some frustration.

The key worker programme is of great importance to staff/prisoner relationships and pivotal to the continuity of pastoral support for the prisoners. The senior leadership team has expressed an intention to prioritise this, going forward.

5.4 Equality and diversity

There is a strategic equality policy, with monthly equality meetings. There is support for foreign nationals, such as English for speakers of other languages. Some excellent work has been observed with a Vietnamese prisoner; flash cards were used to help him communicate, and to communicate basic cleaning and hygiene procedures. In addition, a senior officer has learnt some basic Vietnamese words to communicate with that prisoner.

Prisoners with disabilities are well cared for. Brinsford has accommodated prisoners with mobility issues very well. In one instance, a prisoner with physical disabilities and Alzheimer's disease was exceptionally well cared for in the healthcare department for many weeks.

Prisoners of all ethnic backgrounds and faiths are well cared for.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

Brinsford's multi-faith centre is run by the senior chaplain. She and her team are proactive in supporting prisoners, and they make a significant contribution to the positive atmosphere in the prison. The chaplaincy delivers a range of religious instruction and behaviour classes, and is actively integrated into the prison.

The team includes chaplains from Buddhist, Catholic, Free Church, Hindu, Jehovah's Witness, Jewish, Mormon, Muslim, Pagan, Rastafarian and Sikh traditions, and, when a prisoner requests support from another faith group, efforts are made to arrange this.

The multi-faith centre is a welcoming, calm and supportive environment. Noticeboards are well organised, with a clear programme of worship advertised, alongside useful information, such as on bereavement support, Prayer Line (available seven days a week, from 9am to 8pm) and Freeline, for prayer requests. The chaplaincy team journal is kept up to date and contains useful information about the prisoners, with regard to bereavement concerns, those on assessment, care custody and teamwork (ACCT) procedures, and so on.

From March 2020, when religious services were suspended owing to Covid-19 restrictions, the chaplains increased the frequency of their visits to the residential units. During the period of lockdown, in-cell worship was organised and this was gradually opened up as restrictions were lifted. Opportunities to celebrate special events, such as Eid, are embraced as far as this can be done in prison.

Prisoners are supported by the chaplaincy and other specialist staff, such as the disabilities nurse, during times of personal stress. For example, bereavement support and access to online funerals are supported.

In line with their statutory duties, during the year the chaplains have made daily visits to the segregation unit. They have provided faith-based learning materials and also given one-to-one support, and have invited prisoners to attend services, provided that safety requirements are not compromised.

The chaplaincy team is a vital and integrated part of the pastoral provision of Brinsford. The team values the support of staff – particularly the senior leadership team. The senior chaplain is a member of the latter team, which demonstrates the value placed on this provision.

5.6 Incentives and earned privileges (IEP)

The IEP scheme is used to foster good behaviour and tackle poor behaviour and breaches of prison rules. On entry, prisoners are placed on the standard level. If they are transferred from another prison, they are retained on their status from the originating establishment. Prisoner induction includes information on incentives, privileges and expectations with regard to the standard of behaviour. Individual officers can issue IEP warnings, and an immediate downgrade may be used for serious incidents.

During the pandemic, the basic regime level has not been used and televisions are not being removed from cells. There is a concern about how prisoners will react when the Covid-19 restrictions are fully lifted and televisions removed from cells holding prisoners on a 'basic' regime.

5.7 Complaints

Brinsford follows the complaints policy framework, as reissued November 2020, and which all staff were advised to read.

A senior manager has ownership of the quality assurance process for prisoner complaints, and every month a random sample of these is selected for test and audit. The findings from this audit, together with recommendations, are reported and discussed at senior leadership team meetings.

There is a clear set of procedures for dealing with prisoners' complaints, which are made known to the prisoners during induction. Complaint forms are available throughout the establishment in areas frequently accessed by prisoners, such as association areas, and are clearly advertised. For those who might struggle to complete a written complaint, there is support from officers on the wing, but where this is a confidential Comp 2 complaint, which may be about staff behaviour, this is not ideal.

Prisoners who have difficulty with written communication may submit a complaint verbally, with timeframes as per written complaints. Prisoners whose first language is not English may submit a complaint in their first language, if they so wish. The prison's intranet has complaint forms in 19 languages and may be printed as required.

Arrangements are in place for complaints to be considered during weekends and on public holidays. They are answered in line with the timeline requirements set out in the complaints policy framework, which is within five working days of the complaint being logged (or 10 working days if the complaint is about a member of staff). Interim replies are given within these timeframes if it is not possible to give a full reply. The interim reply gives some indication of when a full reply may be expected. The vast majority of the complaints received are related to property (see below).

Complaints by themes, April 2020 to March 2021

Total complaints: 412

The most significant were as follows:

36.5% - property

25% - residential

9.5% - offender management unit (OMU)

4% - letters

4% - visits

1% - bullying

There were no complaints about food.

Location of prisoners' complaints

29% - Res 1

14% - Res 2

22% - Res 3

26% - Res 4

9% - Res 5

75% of complaints were made by 18–21-year-olds

21% - 22–29-year-olds

0.7% - 30–39-year-olds

0.7% - 40–49-year-olds

1.6% - 50–59-year-olds

81% of complaints were dealt with early or within the appropriate timeframe.

43% of complaints were made by white British males.

5.8 Property

A complaints assurance check in November 2020 identified that most complaints at Brinsford were related to property, with the inclusive average monthly percentage of these complaints, from June to November, being 30.2%.

Common themes regarding property are:

- property not transferred with the person
- not knowing what has happened/is happening to property. Has it arrived in the establishment/where is it?
- the time taken to issue people with their property from reception
- missing property.

There was a complaints assurance check in November 2020. In response to complaints about property, the following points were observed:

- A database was introduced to record property that is received by Brinsford, which details the date received and where it is. This was introduced initially so that staff on residential units could access it in order to let residents know where their parcel was. There were some early problems in keeping the database up to date but these have since been ironed out.
- Prisoners have been reminded about the process of having property sent in or ordered, how it is sent in (including during the Covid-19 lockdown) and what they can or cannot have sent in.
- Issuing property in a timely manner has been delayed by the need for items to be searched by the dog team prior to issuing them. Staff absences owing to Covid-19 added to delays.
- There is a secured room to hold items prior to being recorded on F2056 property cards. Amey adhered to a weighted policy, which equated to two bags per prisoner, which meant that some items were not sent with a prisoner. A local decision has been taken to use transport to deliver items to establishments receiving our prisoners, but further encouragement is required for establishments sending prisoners to Brinsford, and this may require a regional approach.
- There were some errors in recording complaints on the database, which have been rectified to ensure that complaints are recorded against the correct theme.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare: general

Pre-Covid-19, healthcare services were provided by Care UK, now Practice Plus Group. The 'outpatient department' continues to provide a good service.

6.2 Physical healthcare

Nursing staff and officers dedicated to the healthcare department have carried out some excellent work to help the prisoners in their care. The area is well managed, and there has been an overall reduction in the number of patients being housed in the facility. There has also been a big reduction in the number of prisoners who have needed constant watch, which is a tribute to the staff.

While the problem of non-attendance at appointments continues, the recruitment of health champions in 2019/20 (specially trained and trusted prisoners) recognised this as a concern. The champions continued to 'sell' the benefits of good health and chased those who did not attend, working to eliminate this problem by making certain that appointment cards were delivered accurately (thereby cutting out the 'I did not know' excuse). During the pandemic, Brinsford had a small number of prisoners who tested positive for Covid-19, and most cases were dealt with quickly and efficiently, ensuring that they isolated on their wing. Healthcare staff continued to monitor them and worked well with other prison staff to care for them.

New prisoners were kept in an 'isolation bubble' for two weeks before they were moved to the normal wings. Staff were tested, and any with risk factors remained at home until they were safe. Overall, the prison managed the different stages of the pandemic very well, and healthcare staff were very satisfied with the arrangements.

6.3 Mental health

The Board has previously expressed concern regarding the number of mental health patients held at Brinsford. Over the last 12 months, although the numbers have reduced, we are still concerned over the time taken to transfer some patients to more specialised care. While staff provide excellent care, and in some cases one-to-one support, the mental health team does not have the facilities, and are not equipped, to deal with those with severe mental health problems.

6.4 Social care

Social care is conducted adequately at the prison. Outside agencies, like Barnardo's, provide support and training to staff about care leavers and other similar issues, such as awareness of adverse childhood experiences.

6.5 Exercise, time out of cell

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, prisoners have been locked in their cells for 23 hours a day for long periods over the course of the last 12 months. Outdoor exercise

was reduced to up to 45 minutes once a day, and association time outside of cells has been limited. This mirrored the government lockdown for the entire country.

The provision of in-cell telephones has meant that prisoners are better able to enjoy their time out of cell, rather than queueing to use a communal telephone. When restrictions were relaxed, Brinsford tried to ease the restrictions, according to HMPPS guidance, and time out of cell for those who were unemployed increased to one hour 15 minutes each day.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

While drug use within Brinsford is still a concern, the number of cases has reduced in the last 12 months. The drug support programmes are still limited, as is the post-release support. Much of the support is reliant on internal programmes, which have been restricted over the last 12 months due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

6.7 Soft skills

Limited soft skill development and wellbeing work has taken place over the past 12 months. This is largely due to the restrictions that have been put in place nationally. While education work packs were provided, little was provided in terms of mindfulness, mental health and wellbeing. We are not aware of any meditation, yoga or creative skills within Brinsford.

7. Progression and resettlement

Education, training and employment (ETE) will now be managed by a company called Maximus, which was awarded the contract from the Ministry of Justice.

7.1 Education, library

Education

In last year's report, the Board repeated concerns about education at Brinsford. Novus continues to hold the contract for this. The contract year began in April 2020, but it was actually July/August 2020 when Novus staff were back on-site. In this reporting year, there have been improvements in education provision, but optimal progress has been impeded by the Covid-19 regime.

In March, the Covid-19 pandemic saw the regime at Brinsford shut down, as it did across all prisons, and all education ceased. The prison was prompt to facilitate in-cell activities in the form of distraction packs, provided with the assistance of the library staff. With the education department and classrooms not in use, the opportunity was taken to improve the physical condition of the education facilities by painting and updating furniture.

When education recommenced in August/September 2020, all learning was completed in-cell. The benefit of this was that prisoners had a less rigid timescale to complete their courses, and so could complete work at their own pace. They also did not have the distraction or peer pressure from other prisoners, which often hinders classroom-based learning; the higher retention rate during initial in-cell learning

supports this. Despite all of this, the feedback received from some prisoners is that they prefer classroom-based learning.

Since June 2020, Brinsford has had 346 learners undertake 598 courses, and below is a snapshot of some of the courses:

English (at various levels): 57

Mathematics (at various levels): 53

Health and nutrition: 35

Mentoring: 54

Health and safety: 115

Food safety: 85

Employability skills: 64

Construction Skills Certification Scheme cards: 27

Fork-lift truck: 20

Music: 20.

To date, 298 prisoners have completed their courses, with 251 achieving, and 35 awaiting, results. To Brinsford's credit, the majority of courses offered are accredited, including those undertaken in-cell, and all marking is quality assured. Other prisons offer more courses, with some only being a few hours long, whereas Brinsford offers less selection, but with the benefit of qualifications being accredited. This puts prisoners in a stronger position post-release, as accredited qualifications can be a stepping stone to obtaining further qualifications in the community, and are recognised by employers.

Of the courses offered, only mathematics, English, food safety and some English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) are assessed by examination. Despite the restricted regime, examinations for these courses still went ahead. This was done using one-to-one examination methods, conducted in a socially distanced, compliant manner. All other courses are assessed by a portfolio, or workbook, which is well suited to in-cell learning.

Brinsford has only one practical course on offer, which is window fitting. This has been delivered in-cell as, although the course has a practical component, only completion of the theory element is required in order to obtain the qualification, so the practical elements have not gone ahead. In January 2021, eight prisoners were doing this course; to date, they have all completed the course, with four passing and four failing. Unfortunately, the four that failed have since been released or transferred, so it has not been possible to follow up. Novus does not have any employer contacts in the window-fitting industry, so the prison is not able to offer prisoners who pass this course any employment opportunities in this field following release, which is perhaps a missed opportunity.

The fact that there is only one practical course and that there isn't contact with employers seems a real gap, especially for this age-group, who are much more likely to engage if education is linked to training.

During this reporting period, no prisoner has completed the ESOL course but there are eight to 10 prisoners part-way through it. The maximum number of spaces

available on this course is filled, but there may be prisoners who are eligible for, and would benefit from, the course, but are not offered or encouraged to take it due to the low number of available spaces.

Each prisoner is screened during the induction process, to assess whether they have any additional learning support needs (ALS). The prison currently has 25 prisoners being supported directly with ALS, while others are supported within their course, as all tutors are trained to deliver ALS.

Throughout this reporting period, prisoners have been supported by tutors via their in-cell telephone. To encourage learning, and so occupy prisoners during the increased time in-cell, an incentive payment of £2 per week has been offered to those who are seen to engage actively with learning. Engagement is assessed by tutors, who measure it based on their interaction with students and whether there is work completed and submitted for marking. On average, 85–90% of those on courses have engaged and received their bonus payments.

As the Covid-19 regime has gradually been lifted, education staff have started to meet prisoners on a one-to-one basis in a room on the spur of the residences. Due to the success of in-cell learning, there are plans for a new 'blended learning' approach to continue. Due to a lack of education spaces available for all prisoners, they will take it in turns and rotate between face-to-face classroom work and time spent working in-cell.

Towards the end of this reporting period, in May, under the dynamic purchasing agreement, the prison purchased a two-year contract with Wayout TV. This service provides two channels, one of which is Way2Learn, which is dedicated to education delivery. Prisoners can access this service via their in-cell television, where teaching videos are shown for prisoners to watch, and then complete the accompanying workbook. There are eight to 12 courses available, ranging from customer service to workplace digital skills. Although courses are unaccredited, they are bite-sized and so ideal for prisoners with short sentences, which is something Brinsford has been lacking. To date, there have been no applications from prisoners to join, but this is probably due to it being a new provision, so work needs to be done to increase awareness of the programme among prisoners.

The Shannon Trust reading scheme operates in the prison. Prisoners are trained to become mentors, who then teach other prisoners reading skills and, prior to March 2020 there was a strong cohort of mentors. Unfortunately, due to a combination of the Covid-19 regime, which has made access to a mentor difficult, and mentors being released or transferred, the reading scheme has become stagnant.

There are now just a couple of mentors, on one residential block, and, although the establishment ran a campaign to recruit new ones, this was unsuccessful. There are plans to run another campaign in the coming months, and it is hoped that, once prisoners are able to move between residential blocks, this will encourage applications.

Towards the end of this reporting year, there has been a renewed focus on education, work and training, and the Governor has shared with the Board ambitious

plans to revamp the provision. This is needed, given Brinsford's new status as a resettlement prison, which means that education provision will be a key function.

Library

The library at Brinsford is part of the Staffordshire County Library Services and is well resourced. To ensure that it is inclusive and offers reading material to cater for all prisoners, regardless of language spoken, library staff monitor the nationalities present among the prison population and adapt library stock accordingly. While the pandemic has restricted the service that the library can provide, library staff have endeavoured to ensure that prisoners are able to derive some benefit from it.

Once the Covid-19 regime began at the end of March 2020, library staff worked remotely, and did not return on-site until October 2020. During this time, officers collected books from the library and put them on the landings of each residential block, to allow prisoners access to reading material. As prisoners were held in their cells for 23 hours a day, library staff compiled a distraction pack, entitled 'Boredom Buster'.

These packs were initially distributed by officers on each wing. Following their initial creation in March, pack contents were refreshed in December 2020 and July 2021. 'Boredom Busters' are only available in English and, while the packs contain colouring, which is not language dependent and so can be completed by prisoners who are not fluent in English, it would be good to see provision that caters specifically for foreign national prisoners.

On returning on-site in October 2020, library staff implemented a system whereby prisoners could request books and activity packs (called 'outreach pieces') via a form. In June 2021, in response to requests, the library provided 141 outreach pieces.

The library has also played an important role in facilitating family contact, through running programmes from 'Storybook Dads'. The story CDs and DVDs programme usually offered by the library involves a physical process and so, due to Covid-19 restrictions, this had to be halted at the end of March 2020. It restarted in May 2021 and has proved popular; from May to June 2021, 36 storybook recordings were completed by 21 prisoners. They are allowed to create and send more than one recording if they wish; they can, for example, send a recording to other family members, as well as their children.

In order to continue to offer prisoners a creative way of maintaining family links during the pandemic, the library began another programme from 'Storybook Dads', called 'Swaps'. Brinsford and HMP Featherstone are the only prisons in the Midlands offering this. This programme did not start until April 2021 as there was a delay for it to be approved by the security department.

'Swaps' involves a pack of activity sheets for the prisoners to complete, and one for their young relative. Once completed, the packs are exchanged (via post) and this has allowed children to learn interesting information about their relative in prison. It also helps to maintain family relationships, and gives those prisoners who participate

something purposeful to do during their time in-cell. From April to June 2021, there were 11 pairs of 'Swaps' packs completed.

7.2. Vocational training, work

Work was all but cancelled for all prisoners during the Covid-19 lockdown, apart from the essential services of kitchen workers, T-packing contract workers, wing cleaners and British Institute of Cleaning Science (BICS) cleaners, which has allowed 123 prisoners to continue to work. However, at the start of lockdown some of this essential work, such as tea packing, recycling and gardening, was carried out by prison staff.

In October, the work available included 16 places in recycling, one in the catering academy, 12 in tea packing, six in amenities, six in gardens, three in laundry, nine in BICS, 10 in kitchens, 56 wing cleaners, seven orderlies, three in stores and six in Clean Rehabilitative Enabling and Decent (CRED) programmes. This totalled 135 work places available for 500+ prisoners, although this has now been increased to 158 jobs available.

Towards the end of the reporting period, Brinsford moved into stage 3 of the prison service recovery plan and more work was able to be reintroduced, such as take-away food from the Serving Thyme Cafe. Usually, there are six places available for each member of staff on work detail, but this has been increased, where possible, to eight per officer.

There have not been enough places available for all prisoners to work or attend education; this has been helped with the Covid-19 restrictions and staff sickness.

7.3 Offender management and progression

On arriving at Brinsford, prisoners attend an induction course which lasts two weeks, but which does not cover offending behaviour. Many prisoners potentially 'sleep through' their sentence, particularly those serving a shorter sentence, and by the time they have been assessed for work and a job becomes vacant, they are near the end of their term. Often, these prisoners complete their whole sentence without attending education, work or a rehabilitation course. This is particularly risky for those who are serving a sentence for violence and aggression as there has been no opportunity to challenge their behaviour.

This will also apply to those on remand, although the length of time spent on remand is lengthening, due to the backlog of the courts. Nevertheless, there should be opportunities for remand prisoners to attend work, and/or courses if they want to, before they are released or sentenced, but it often takes too long to get on to one of these courses because of the lack of places available.

Normally, the Thinking Skills Programme (TSP) and Resolve (for violence and aggression) run three times per week, but, during the whole of the reporting period, only TSP ran, with just two prisoners. There would normally be eight prisoners on TSP, three times a week for six to seven weeks, and nine prisoners on the Resolve course for nine to 11 weeks. The Board feels that some prisoners will be released

before they have the opportunity to attend an appropriate programme, and that more places should therefore be made available.

Programmes were stopped or reduced because of the safety of prisoners and the reduced number of staff due to sickness, shielding or isolation and the subsequent necessity of having to move staff to other areas to cover for them. Programmes were not stopped because of the reluctance of staff to work.

7.4 Family contact

Towards the end of the last reporting period, in-cell telephones were installed in each cell. These have proved to be invaluable during the Covid-19 regime as they have allowed communication to remain open between prisoners and their families, without the time and access restrictions that come with using shared telephones on the wing. This has gone some way to staving off feelings of loneliness and isolation that come with being confined in-cell for long periods. Recognising this, each prisoner was allocated an additional £5 credit per week.

There was also an opportunity for prisoners to use their telephones to call a freephone number, set up nationally, to speak to a IMB member from elsewhere. This member could then pass on the application to the Board at Brinsford, who would follow up any issues. This was very useful during the period of lockdown, when we were not able to visit as often, and some prisoners used this method of contact.

Upon entering the Covid-19 regime, in-person visits stopped. However, Brinsford endeavoured to facilitate the maintenance of contact between prisoners and their loved ones, and began to offer Purple Visits (online video visits) in July 2020. Brinsford and HMP Stafford were the only establishments in the Midlands to offer virtual visits at this time, and 2,182 Purple Visits took place from July 2020 to June 2021.

These have received a mixed response from prisoners; some have welcomed them, while others have preferred to use their in-cell telephones for contact with their families. The reason given for this is that Purple Visits cannot offer physical contact, such as a hug, which some prisoners find upsetting as they can see their loved ones, but cannot touch them. These prisoners say that a Purple Visit offers no more benefit than a telephone call, adding that contact via their in-cell telephone offers more privacy than a video call.

There were also teething problems in the early days of Purple Visits. The families of prisoners experienced problems with the software needed to facilitate these. The delays in addressing software problems caused difficulties for families wanting to access the visits, but the prison had no control over resolving these issues, being reliant on the external provider. There was also a period, in early 2020, when computers were down in two residential blocks, causing disruption to Purple Visits. At the time, prisoners expressed their frustration, and these issues have also contributed to the reluctance of some prisoners to use Purple Visits.

In the feedback provided by prisoners, the efficiency of the senior officer responsible for processing applications for Purple Visits was praised. Prisoners were pleased, and inferred from this that staff understand the significance of family contact. Purple Visits are deemed to be an asset, and the senior leadership team intends for them to continue, even when the normal regime is fully resumed. Online video visits, now termed 'family conferences' instead of 'Purple Visits', are particularly useful for those visitors living at distance from the prison. The Board agrees, however, that they should not replace in-person visits.

Refurbishment of the visitors room, including the provision of sofas and social distancing, made for a more welcoming environment, although the capacity was reduced to 15 visits at any one time. There is some concern that this environment will need to be changed to accommodate increased numbers of visitors allowed, post-Covid-19 restrictions, and that the environment will be less welcoming.

In-person visits resumed in May 2021, a week ahead of other establishments in the Midlands, and Purple Visits still remain popular.

Brinsford introduced a no-mask exemption policy, so that all visitors are required to wear a mask unless a family member is medically exempt. For example, one prisoner had a relative with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease who was medically exempt from wearing a mask, so, in this instance, closed visits were facilitated to ensure that this prisoner did not miss out on family contact.

Within the visits area there is a children's play area, which has had to remain closed, and, with no physical contact allowed between family and prisoner, visiting children became bored. The Governor responded quickly and organised for colouring activities to be stationed on each table to occupy young visitors and allow visits to run more smoothly.

7.5 Resettlement planning

Despite lockdown, OMU staff attended the prison and used the in-cell telephony system to keep in touch with prisoners, which meant that the daily work continued.

The Board understands that Brinsford should be moving from a 'complex' prison to a 'standard plus' prison, yet in the summer of 2020 there were 41 prisoners who were either on remand or sentenced for murder and were also on, or expecting, long sentences. In addition, there are around 36 gangs and over 100 gang members in the prison, with an inpatient hospital wing, often holding very difficult patients, some of whom are on transfer from other prisons which are unable to manage them.

When the status of the prison changes, the extra funding that complex prisons bring will no longer be available; this means that the senior leadership team structure will change, which might affect the outcomes for prisoners.

In the reporting year, visiting groups from the Prison Advice and Care Trust, Barnardo's, Catch 22 and Trailblazers, plus funding from the dynamic purchasing system, all helped to deal with the violence and aggression shown by prisoners, and,

although this could not go ahead during the pandemic, they remain a very useful resource for the prison.

Kinetic Youth came back into the prison mid-pandemic, and has informed casual conversations with members of, or those associated with, gangs during association, for example.

During the reporting year, a total of 684 prisoners were released, 48 to hotels, 102 to education and training, 51 to employment and six to no fixed abode (NFA); other releases were to hospitals or to court (see table below for 7 months).

	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
Rel	86	70	56	65
HPT	9	4	2	-
ETE	14	9	15	-
Emp	5	3	3	-
NFA	1	1	2	-

REL = release from prison

HPT = Hotel accommodation provided during Covid-19

ETE = Education Training & Employment referrals

NFA = No fixed abode.

Emp = employment

HPT was used as emergency accommodation during Covid-19 as all releases had to be housed, even if temporarily, and the local council then had 56 days to find them alternative accommodation.

8. The work of the IMB

Generally the Board carries out its role in the following ways but some face to face activities were curtailing during the pandemic.

1. Two members are on rota every week of the year and they visit all areas of the prison as often as they can during that week. A written rota report is then produced.
2. Board members aim to attend every segregation review, which must take place within 72 hours of a prisoner being segregated, and any decisions taken, that are not within the agreed framework, will be challenged.
3. There are eight boxes around the prison where prisoners can post a written application to see a Board member, who will then visit the prisoner and follow up any issues that arise from their enquiries. Board members always do their best to resolve the difficulty.
4. Members attend meetings as observers and report back to the rest of the Board at monthly meetings.
5. Board members have a good working relationship with the senior managers and can approach members of staff for information when required.
6. Monthly Board meetings take place and are attended by the Governor or, in his/her absence, another governor, so that issues of concern can be discussed and information on future developments can be shared.
7. The Board has a good mix of experienced members and some who are recently appointed. New members shadow the more experienced members until it is felt that they are able to complete the task on their own. Training is provided at meetings and can be given by experienced members or other prison staff.
8. The Board endeavours to visit other prisons and other IMBs, and attend quarterly regional meetings with other IMBs in the area.

Board statistics

RECOMMENDED COMPLEMENT OF BOARD MEMBERS	16
NUMBER OF BOARD MEMBERS AT THE START OF THE REPORTING PERIOD	11
NUMBER OF BOARD MEMBERS AT THE END OF THE REPORTING PERIOD	8
TOTAL NUMBER OF VISITS TO THE ESTABLISHMENT	141
TOTAL NUMBER OF SEGREGATION REVIEWS ATTENDED	147

Applications to the IMB

COD E	SUBJECT	PREVIOUS REPORTIN G YEAR	CURRENT REPORTI NG YEAR
A	ACCOMMODATION, INCLUDING LAUNDRY, CLOTHING, ABLUTIONS	2	1
B	DISCIPLINE, INCLUDING ADJUDICATIONS, IEP, SANCTIONS	1	2
C	EQUALITY	0	0
D	PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY, INCLUDING EDUCATION, WORK, TRAINING, LIBRARY, REGIME, TIME OUT OF CELL	1	2
E1	LETTERS, VISITS, TELEPHONES, PUBLIC PROTECTION RESTRICTIONS	11	7
E2	FINANCE, INCLUDING PAY, PRIVATE MONIES, SPENDS	1	2
F	FOOD AND KITCHENS	0	0
G	HEALTH, INCLUDING PHYSICAL, MENTAL, SOCIAL CARE	8	6
H1	PROPERTY WITHIN THIS ESTABLISHMENT	10	1
H2	PROPERTY DURING TRANSFER OR IN ANOTHER ESTABLISHMENT OR LOCATION	5	2
H3	CANTEEN, FACILITY LIST, CATALOGUE(S)	2	2
I	SENTENCE MANAGEMENT, INCLUDING HOME DETENTION CURFEW, RELEASE ON TEMPORARY LICENCE, PAROLE, RELEASE DATES, RECATEGORISATION	11	8
J	STAFF/PRISONER CONCERNS, INCLUDING BULLYING	11	7
K	TRANSFERS	5	0
L	MISCELLANEOUS, INCLUDING COMPLAINTS SYSTEM	0	0
	TOTAL NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS	68	40



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