



# **Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP The Verne**

**For the reporting year  
1 August 2022 to 31 July 2023**

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# Contents

<b>Introductory sections 1 – 3</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Statutory role of the IMB	3
2. Description of the establishment	4
3. Executive summary	5
 <b>Evidence sections 4 – 7</b>	
4. Safety	7
5. Humane treatment	10
6. Health and wellbeing	14
7. Progression and resettlement	17
 <b>The work of the IMB</b>	
Board statistics	19
Applications to the IMB	19
 <b>Appendix A</b>	
Equality and diversity: further data	20

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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 IMB is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

## 2. Description of the establishment

2.1 HMP The Verne is located on the Isle of Portland in Dorset. The Verne citadel, constructed using convict labour between 1857-81, served as Portland Harbour's primary defensive fortification. Many of the original buildings are still in use today and are Grade II or II\* listed by Historic England. These buildings require constant upkeep and attention and cannot be altered without permission.

2.2 The Verne operated as a prison from 1949 until October 2013. It then housed an adult male immigration removal centre (IRC) from March 2014 until December 2017. On 28 July 2018, The Verne re-opened as a category C adult training prison, operated by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), for prisoners convicted of sexual offences (PCOSO).

2.3 The certified normal accommodation (or number of prisoners a prison can hold without being crowded) is 594; the operational capacity (the maximum number of prisoners that can be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the planned regime) is 608<sup>1</sup>. The prisoner accommodation is described in 5.1 below.

2.4 Weston College provides most of the vocational and educational opportunities; these include level one constructional skills, bricklaying, barber shop, art and music. These are housed in the older 'casemates' part of the estate, as are the art room, library and multi-faith centre. Sports facilities at The Verne include:

- a larger playing field for football and cricket
- a well-equipped gymnasium and other outside exercise equipment.

Sadly, the multi-use games area (MUGA) was lost in order to make space for the proposed 40-unit portacabin accommodation.

2.5 Apart from education and health, HMPPS is responsible for all services currently offered in The Verne. Healthcare was provided by the Practice Plus Group until the contract was awarded to Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust during the reporting year. Social care forms part of the statutory duties of Dorset Council. Gov Facilities Services Limited (GFSL) provide maintenance and project services.

2.6 Voluntary organisations regularly attending the prison included: Age UK, Circles South-west, the Samaritans, the Shannon Trust, Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).

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<sup>1</sup> Figures included in this report are local management information. They reflect the prison's position at the time of reporting but may be subject to change following further validation and therefore may not always tally with Official Statistics later published by the Ministry of Justice.

### **3. Key points**

#### **3.1 Background to the report**

This report presents the findings of the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) of HMP The Verne ('the Board') for the period 1 August 2022 to 31 July 2023.

Although the Board had participated in the scheme whereby prisoners could use an 0800 number to speak to an IMB volunteer who recorded their complaints, this service was discontinued during the reporting period. With the passing of the Covid-19 epidemic, the Board was pleased to return to direct monitoring throughout the reporting period.

#### **3.2 Main findings**

##### **Safety**

The Verne is generally safe: instances of violence remain rare. Disruptive behaviour is dealt with promptly and firmly (see sections 4.2 - 4.4).

##### **Fair and humane treatment**

The prevailing ethos established at The Verne and observed by the Board is one of mutual respect between staff and prisoners.

The Board regrets that, as in its previous reports, it has to point to one area where conditions fall short of humane: the lack of 24-hour provision for an as yet small but growing number of frail, elderly prisoners who will need regular personal care in the future and for those who have needed it in past years (see para. 6.3.1).

##### **Health and wellbeing**

The Board is satisfied that, with the exception of the oldest and frailest prisoners, the health and wellbeing needs of the majority are adequately met (see paras 6.1 - 6.2).

##### **Progression and resettlement**

The Board recognises that The Verne was set up as a training, rather than a resettlement, prison and is aware of the continuing efforts to prepare the significant number of prisoners who are released directly into the community.

The Board recognises the efforts of the prison regime to reallocate resources to address this issue; and we acknowledge the dedication and professionalism of those few members of staff who work in this area. While the shortage of category D places continues to make such releases an unfortunate necessity, the Board does not consider the resettlement provision to be satisfactory.

#### **3.3 Main areas for development**

##### ***TO THE MINISTER***

The Board invites the Minister to ensure adequate funding for the resettlement role currently undertaken by HMP The Verne.

##### ***TO THE PRISON SERVICE***

The Board urges HMPPS to recognise the efforts made by the senior management team to provide a resettlement service despite the absence of dedicated funding.

## **TO THE GOVERNOR**

The Board encourages the Governor to continue the search for further employment opportunities for Verne prisoners.

### **3.4 Progress since the last report**

The Board recognises the continuing efforts of the staff to maintain a stable and safe regime within the prison. It is aware of the factors – shortage of purposeful activities; high turnover; increased numbers of younger arrivals – which militate against this.

In previous reports, the Board has stressed to the need for a facility which would enable the social care needs of prisoners to be met more adequately than hitherto. The Board therefore welcomes the 16-room social care unit established in Dorset wing (see 5.1.2).

However, the Board regrets that there is currently no plan to establish a 'community hospital' at The Verne. This has been discussed in earlier years. The Board remains of the view that a hospital type facility would reduce the need for elderly or sick prisoners to visit Dorset County Hospital for minor procedures and would offer considerable savings in staff time on escort and bedwatch duties.

## Evidence sections 4 – 7

### 4. Safety

#### 4.1 Reception and induction

4.1.1 Prisoners arriving at The Verne are escorted to the reception building. From the outset, they are introduced to the prison ethos of respect for the individual coupled with intolerance of anti-social behaviour. Their property is collected and stored. They may be given a light meal. Those with obvious mobility issues are then transferred to Dorset wing but the majority move to the induction wing, Chesil (C1).

4.1.2 The week-long induction programme seeks to instil further the prevailing ethos of The Verne regime: mutual respect between staff and prisoners, intolerance of violence and the development of a supportive and caring community. The programme offers the opportunity to become acquainted with all aspects of prison life: education, healthcare, work, gym, library, chaplaincy. They receive talks from representatives of protected interests (see 5.4.1 below), from Listeners and, where possible, a member of the IMB. Prisoners should be given the name of their key worker during induction although it tends to be some time later that the first meeting takes place.

#### 4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

4.2.1 There were five deaths in custody during the reporting period: one, in September 2022, was apparently self-inflicted.

4.2.2 Prisoners who threaten self-harm are placed on an ACCT (assessment, care in custody and teamwork) order. They are carefully monitored (hourly if necessary) and frequently reviewed by a multi-disciplinary staff team until it is felt safe for the ACCT to be closed. Members of the IMB are invited to monitor these reviews when possible and monitor the monthly audit of the relevant documents which ensures that they are fully and correctly completed. In July 2021 a revised system of ACCT was introduced across all prisons in England and Wales with the aim of reducing self-harm. The Board is happy to report that this new system appears to be working satisfactorily at The Verne.

4.2.3 The rise in the number of ACCT orders may be attributed to the increased intake of recently sentenced and younger men who have little or no experience of life in prison.

*Table 4.2.1: ACCT, Behaviour Monitoring (BM), Challenge Support Intervention Plans (CSIP)*

	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21
ACCT	109	53	96
BM	108	133	186
CSIP	22	16	46

#### 4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

4.3.1 Table 4.3.1 summarises the instances of disruptive behaviour which were reported to the Security Dept.

4.3.2 The more serious type of reportable incident will result in a prisoner being charged, subject to adjudication (see Table 4.3.2) and, if the charge is upheld, sanctions. Sanctions include cellular confinement, forfeit of privileges and loss of earnings. From discussions with other IMBs, the Board remains satisfied that the below data are indicative of a prison in which

acts of violence and indiscipline are relatively rare. Each wing has a violence reduction representative. They, along with staff, seek to de-escalate incidents as soon as they arise.

*Table 4.3.1: Reportable Incidents*

<b>Finds</b>		
SIM/Memory devices	7	
Drugs	13	
Metal objects/weapons	5	
Alcohol	9	
Miscellaneous	24	
Sub-total		58
<b>Self-harm</b>		
Involving 27 individuals		58
<b>Assaults</b>		
Prisoner on prisoner	16	
(of which were serious – 5)		
Prisoner on staff	6	
(of which were serious – 3)		
Sub-total		22
Key/ lock incidents		39
Use of force		15
Damage to property		21
Death in custody		5
Tool/ implement loss		6
Miscellaneous		15
<b>Total</b>		229

*Table 4.3.2: Adjudications*

Alcoholic intoxication	0
Unauthorised possession	62
Damage property other than his own	8
Disrespect	0
Assault or threatening behaviour	37
Disobedience	58
Fighting	4
Endangers health or safety	13
Obstruction	6
Administering controlled drug	29
<b>Total</b>	217

4.3.3 A CSIP may be instituted following a CSIP referral and investigation of an incident. A referral by a member of staff may result from various triggers: arguments on the wing and challenging negative behaviour to providing additional support to prisoners that are believed to be vulnerable or have been the victim of an alleged assault or may be at risk of being bullied. Following an investigation by Safer Communities, one of three outcomes will ensue:

- Mediation: if no new information is brought to light, the staff member will speak to the prisoner(s) involved and will mediate the situation.
- Behaviour monitoring: staff monitor a prisoner's associations and their interactions with staff for an initial period of 14 days. BMs are used primarily to gather further information on allegations made, to keep an eye on vulnerable prisoners, to track alleged bullies, to monitor interactions between prisoners who have had issues with each other and to gauge the suitability of prisoners who arrive at The Verne with security concerns.
- A CSIP Plan is opened when a prisoner requires longer periods of support, has displayed frequent challenging behaviour, or has been involved in an incident such as sexual assault or violence which has resulted in a prolonged stay in the Care and Separation Unit (CSU).



#### **4.4 Vulnerable prisoners, safeguarding**

4.4.1 As in all prisons there are vulnerable groups. Unpaid debt (especially in respect of vapes) can give rise to bullying and such behaviour, when suspected by staff, triggers covert behaviour monitoring. Moving the bully to another wing has occasionally proved effective. There have been occasions where prisoners who clearly demonstrated that they could not adhere to the non-violent regime established at The Verne have been transferred to other prisons.

#### **4.5 Use of force**

4.5.1 Force was used on 15 occasions in the reporting period; the reasons are listed in Table 4.5.1.

*Table 4.5.1: Use of Force*

	<b>2022/23</b>	<b>2021/22</b>
Preventing self-harm	4	3
Non-compliance	8	2
Assault	2	2
Good order or discipline	0	2
Others (escorting)	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>11</b>

#### **4.6 Preventing illicit items**

4.6.1 The 58 finds of illicit items are listed in Table 4.3.1. The Board does not consider these to be excessive or indicative of any systemic failure by the prison authorities.

## **5. Fair and humane treatment**

### **5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food**

5.1.1 Constructed in the early 1970s, the greater part of the residential accommodation consists of three blocks each divided into two units. Each of the six wings - Arne, Abbotsbury, Bincombe, Blandford, Corfe and Chesil - has two spurs, each of twenty rooms, on both the first and second floors. The rooms do not have sanitation, but each spur has 24-hour access to WCs, washbasins and showers. Those prisoners employed in cleaning have maintained a very high standard of hygiene within all wings. On the ground floor of each unit there is a laundry, servery, dining area, communal area, and office.

5.1.2 Dorset wing is situated in the old casemate part of the prison. All 10 dormitories are on the ground floor with no stairs. This wing houses prisoners with mobility issues and social care needs. It has its own servery, WCs and showers. Two of the dormitories have been reconfigured for new enhanced social care accommodation. Each of these consists of eight separate rooms with hospital-style beds. Adjacent to these dormitories is a newly refurbished shower and WC facility. Each cubicle has its own shower, WC and wash basin. There is a low-level kick strip and pull cord alarm system for assistance. These are to a very high standard.

5.1.3 Evershot wing comprises of 24 low-level-type pods. Each of these pods has its own WC and shower. It has its own kitchen area and day room. There is an office within its perimeter fence and gate. Prisoners located here tend to be well behaved and unlikely to cause trouble or are close to their release date.

5.1.4 Fleet wing: work has started on this new accommodation block aimed for completion in Spring 2024. It will comprise 40 portacabin-type pods in a two-storey unit. Each of these will have its own WC, shower, heating and lighting. It will have a wing office and its own perimeter fence. It will focus on resettlement for prisoners in the last few months of custody. Both Evershot and Fleet will operate a substance free living policy.

5.1.5 The heating boilers failed on two occasions in September 2022. Temporary backup boilers were used to provide heating, whilst repairs were carried out. Hot water was maintained throughout. There is a plentiful supply of portable heaters that are readily available if required. There were very few complaints from prisoners about this issue.

5.1.6 The Board understands that wearing their own clothes is now a privilege enjoyed by prisoners on the enhanced and standard incentive levels.

5.1.7 The kitchen is situated within the accommodation block. The kitchen runs a two-shift system to provide continuity. Three meals per day are provided every day of the year.

5.1.8 The Board is impressed with the variety of menus offered, catering for all prisoner requirements on a very limited per capita allowance. These include allergen-free, gluten-free, kosher and vegan. The kitchen also provides appropriate food for various religious festivals. There are also monthly themed meals not related to religion or special dietary needs. The food provided is of a high standard and is tasted most days by the duty governor and visiting Board member. There were some complaints about portion size but this may be due to inconsistencies at the servery level.

5.1.9 The Verne is fortunate in having extensive grounds, some of which are given over to the growing of vegetables. Three new greenhouses have been erected and raised beds have been constructed to enable elderly and disabled prisoners to join in with the production of food. Over the growing period on average 180 heads of lettuce per week

and five other types of salad ingredients and vegetables were provided. More than 250kg of produce was supplied to the kitchen during the season. Twenty-four prisoners are involved in the growing of the produce. This contribution continues to be most valuable, especially given the sharp increase in food costs currently being experienced. Equipment failures were less of a problem this year compared to previous years.

## **5.2 Segregation, special accommodation**

5.2.1 The Care and Separation Unit (CSU or Swanage unit) consists of eight cells with in-cell sanitation, a shower, an outside exercise yard and a small library. Board members routinely visit the unit during their rota visits. Prisoners located on the unit under Rule 45 (good order or discipline) have access to a television if appropriate. IMB members are alerted by email of any new arrival. During rota visits, they speak to prisoners in their cells. The IMB checks documents in the CSU. These record the visits from staff mandated to attend (namely the duty governor, chaplain and health care).

5.2.2 Table 5.2.1 lists the number segregated, with reason, during the reporting period. Of the 26 prisoners held under Rule 45, 9 were there to safeguard their physical and/or mental health.

*Table 5.2.1: Segregation*

Rule 45 (GOoD)	26
Rule 53 (waiting for initial adjudication)	18
Rule 55 (segregation after adjudication)	6

## **5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers**

5.3.1 The Board is satisfied that staff-prisoner relationships remain as good as previously reported. Most prisoners agree there is a good atmosphere of trust and mutual respect between staff and prisoners.

5.3.2 The Board believes the key worker scheme to be less than satisfactory. However, many prisoners have reported their satisfaction with the scheme.

## **5.4 Equality and diversity**

5.4.1 The Lammy Review (October 2017) recognised that other groups besides black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners – for example, the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community – also required a voice. Consequently, a wide range of minorities are represented at The Verne, including black, Asian and minority ethnic, gypsy, Roma and traveller and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBTQ) prisoners. (In the Appendix, Tables A1-A3 illustrate respectively the distribution of prisoners by age, ethnic group, and sexual orientation.) Reports of discrimination incidents are investigated by the discrimination incident report forms (DIRF) system and are considered at the monthly Equality Action Team meetings. DIRFs are regularly monitored by the Board.

5.4.2 Each of the protected characteristics - age; religion or belief; race; sexual orientation; disability; marriage and civil partnership; gender reassignment - is overseen by a senior manager, a liaison officer and at least one prisoner representative<sup>2</sup>. Forums were held regularly for all protected characteristics, and also for armed services veterans.

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<sup>2</sup> [Protected characteristics | Equality and Human Rights Commission](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics)  
(<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics>)

Prisoners are encouraged to organise special events and religious festivals, often bringing in outside groups.

5.4.3 The Board remains confident that HMP The Verne monitors effectively and addresses the needs of all communities represented in the prison. The staff appear to be conscientious in their respect for all minorities.

## 5.5 Faith and pastoral support

5.5.1 In addition to the Managing Chaplain (Free Church), the Catholic and Muslim chaplains are also full-time with a part time Anglican and Free Church Chaplain. They are supported by Anglican, Sikh, Free Church, and Hindu minimum hours contracted staff. There are also several volunteers – Catholic, Anglican, Salvation Army, amongst others. They work as an inter-faith group, each Chaplain supporting prisoners of all faiths and none.

*Table 5.5.1 Chaplaincy activity*

	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Corporate Worship	587	647	588	750	684	746	684	710	720	795	781	803
Faith Classes	135	228	155	313	400	389	411	420	415	451	410	412
Social Events	35	0	61	109	359	98	105	80	110	32	30	31

5.5.2 The Prison Service recognises 18 different religions. Every prisoner who has registered as a particular faith is entitled to one hour a week corporate worship, and one hour study, and can be excused from work to do so.

5.5.3 The Ramadan fast was observed by prisoners, with customary communal gatherings to break the fast. The Eid feast also entailed a meal taken together. The Muslim and Catholic chaplains were successful in obtaining contributions from external donors to provide extra food for Christmas, Eid as well as the Traveller Festival and Black History Month. All special meals were prepared by the kitchen and the food delivered in special hot boxes.

5.5.4 The Chaplains' normal duties include: looking after the welfare and spiritual needs of prisoners; attending ACCT reviews, adjudications and inductions. The Chaplaincy is usually involved when there is a death of a family member, offering pastoral support.

5.5.5 The Board is aware of the very high regard that Verne prisoners have for the work of the Chaplaincy. The Board is happy to record its own appreciation of the dedication of the team.

## 5.6 Incentive schemes

5.6.1 The Verne is committed to implementing the revised incentives scheme in line with the national Incentives Policy Framework.

5.6.2 The enhanced incentive level offers greater privileges than any of those on standard and basic level to reflect the commitment made in engaging with HMP The Verne's values. Extra privileges offered to enhanced prisoners include access to family days (as per the rota by application namely in one month, children permitted, the next not - alternating); two social video calls, these allow online contact, via a secure platform, in one session per month, but more by application); entitlement to increased spending

money; access to own clothes. A prisoner on the standard incentive level will comply with expected standards and engage in purposeful activity, without going above and beyond this requirement. A move to basic level will result from an individual failing to conform to the behaviour expected of a standard prisoner. The Board remains unaware of any major dissatisfaction at the way this revised scheme is operating.

## 5.7 Complaints

5.7.1 In the reporting period, 1161 complaints were logged (the corresponding figure in our previous report was 1087). Complaint boxes continued to be emptied daily with various complaint forms and confidential access envelopes available. The process continues to be well managed with over 95 per cent of the complaints being responded to within the allocated timeframe. Responses seen by the Board were invariably courteous and considerate.

*Table 5.7.1: Complaints*

Most numerous sources of complaint	OMU	13%
	Residential	12%
	Property	10%
Least numerous sources of complaint	Chaplaincy	1%
	Adjudications	1%
	Social care	1%

5.7.2 An additional 134 complaints were submitted by Verne prisoners for the attention of other establishments. 58 of these complaints were regarding property missing after transfer.

## 5.8 Property

5.8.1 Property loss within the prison resulted in only seven applications (out of 121) to the IMB. However, the loss of property during transfer would appear to be a continuing problem and prompted a further seven applications (see also 5.7.2)

## 5.9 Gymnasium

5.9.1 The gymnasium is housed in one of the older buildings in the prison. The training equipment is modern and well maintained. 454 prisoners were registered for PE (namely 75% of a prison roll of 602); of these 274 (45%) attended the gym regularly. More information about the work of the PE staff is contained in para 6.3.3 below.

## 6. Health and wellbeing

### 6.1 Physical Health

6.1.1 The Verne Healthcare Service continues to provide excellent, high-quality care for all its prisoners. At the beginning of the year the contract was with the Practice Plus Group but during the year, the contract was renegotiated and awarded to Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust. There were a few problems initially with the transfer, mainly with computer issues, and some uncertainty around staffing, but now these have now been rectified and healthcare is once again running smoothly. There are now over 600 prisoners at the prison with the average age being 52 years with 20% being over 65 years (see Appendix Table A1). Many of the prisoners have complex health needs, some having multiple diagnoses, long term or terminal illnesses, and increasingly, as in any aging community, there are numerous prisoners with health and social care needs. Their care is currently provided by a part-time GP who works for five days each week and by nurses and nurse practitioners, some of whom have prescribing rights, from 7.30am until 5.30pm. Two carers continue to provide social care until 7.30 pm. There are also visiting clinicians who provide dentistry, podiatry, optometry, physiotherapy, and x-ray and ultrasound facilities within the prison. Greater use has been made this year of telemedicine calls, arranged with Airedale Health, to specialist consultants for outpatient appointments. This has helped to reduce the number of visits officers have had to make with prisoners to local outpatient clinics and assisted in meeting the Oxleas contractual targets. In this reporting year there is, as yet no overnight care available other than minimal oversight by prison officers and the resident support staff or 'buddies'. It should be noted that the local authority has not, as yet, assessed any of the prisoners as needing this.

6.1.2 The Verne has an excellent take up of the National Guideline Vaccination programme for preventative medicine and has exemplary figures for Covid-19, Flu and Hepatitis vaccinations. The Verne had the best uptake of all prisons in England for the Spring Covid-19 Booster Campaign. The prison also offers screening for bowel cancer, abdominal aortic aneurism, diabetic eye conditions and chlamydia. In June 2023 HMP The Verne became part of a lung cancer screening project run by Southampton University; 200 prisoners are eligible to take part. On admission to The Verne prisoners are offered screening for diseases carried by blood borne viruses such as HIV, hepatitis B and C. A programme has also commenced to offer this to prisoners who were not screened on admission.

6.1.3 As the Verne population is elderly and many have complex healthcare needs it also requires many outpatient appointments. Although telemedicine has reduced some of these by 25 to 30 appointments per month there are still some 70 to 75 required. This puts enormous pressure on the staff as two escorts are required for each visit. The quota is 4 appointments daily (two each morning and two each afternoon). There are also emergency trips to hospital at any other time day or night. Around one third of planned appointments are cancelled due to lack of prison staff, lack of wheelchair transport or lack of staff trained in wheelchair use. The purchase of a 24-hour ECG machine whereby tracings can be sent to Dorchester hospital for analysis has also assisted in reducing the number of hospital visits.

6.1.4 In addition to escorts required for clinics, prison officers are required for bed watches when a prisoner needs admission to hospital. This occurs quite frequently as the prison population is ageing: eg. in January 2023 there were 3000 bed watch hours



required and in May 2023, 1080, hours were required. This puts an additional strain on officer hours available and, to 'find' these hours prisoner association time is often reduced, or already overstretched officers are asked to work additional hours.

## **6.2 Mental health**

6.2.1 Currently the Mental Health Team at The Verne has a caseload of around 100 prisoners. There are about 20 new referrals each month. A psychologist visits for four days each week and there is a waiting list of about 10 weeks. A psychiatrist visits one day each week and this waiting list is about 15 weeks. In addition to this there is a prison psychologist who addresses offending behaviour.

6.2.2 The Verne Substance Misuse Team regularly has about 50 prisoners engaging with their service. About 50% of these are for alcohol abuse and Alcoholics Anonymous hold two meetings each month in the prison to assist with maintaining successful abstinence. Cannabis and cocaine use is also addressed. The Board has become aware recently that there are issues with the trading of prescription drugs. Although many prisoners are allowed "in-possession" medicines which does reduce the pressure of the daily drugs distribution for the pharmacy this is not suitable for all medications when they can be used as prison currency and/or in cases of bullying.

## **6.3 Social care**

6.3.1 As many of The Verne prisoners are ageing the Board has long recognised that many of them will need more health and social care provision as time goes on. Until now this could only be given on an ad hoc basis, and it has often been some weeks before proper social care provision could be provided. As no overnight care has ever been available, it can be argued that the prison was never able to provide truly adequate care for the older or infirm prisoner. In the past however there have been terminally ill prisoners who have chosen to stay in The Verne, a prison they knew as their 'home', to die and to whom it would have been humane to have offered overnight care by staff trained to deliver this. The Board is pleased to report however, that during this reporting year work was started, and completed, to convert two of the 10 cubicle (20 beds) dormitory areas, which largely housed the less able prisoners, into 16 slightly larger rooms which are able to take a full-sized hospital bed, accommodate wheelchairs and are fitted with effective emergency call provisions for both staff and prisoners. There is also a small sluice room with a macerator to allow for disposal of waste, and excellent bathroom and shower facilities to enable the older and less able prisoners to be cared for onsite. As, during the reporting year, The Verne currently had at least two prisoners who required full-time offsite care and therefore the necessary accompanying bed watch officers the opening of this wing will immediately save both money and valuable staff hours. Full-time social care staff (non-prison staff) are being recruited to provide both day and overnight care. This unit will become fully operational sometime during early autumn this year.

6.3.2 Until the unit is fully operational, the prisoners needing additional care continue to receive the social care packages as before, which are covered by the healthcare staff and are assisted by the six prisoners trained as Resident Support Assistants (RSAs). A further six RSAs are being trained and will be available at the end of September. While it should be emphasised that these RSAs are a valuable commodity they are not able to provide any personal care and can only be used to assist in tasks such as collecting meals and post, pushing a wheelchair and general befriending.

6.3.3 Many of the older prisoners also suffer from a lack of exercise and motivation as well as their numerous ailments. Time spent outside was severely curtailed during the Covid-19 period, and many have been reluctant to take up any form of exercise or mental stimulation again. The PE department have been most helpful and innovative in getting these older men more active and engaged in participating in exercise outside and at least five times a week they encourage 'walking for health' around the large prison playing field which is also used by the younger prisoners for football and cricket. There is a specific weekly Gym session reserved for the over 60's where gentler exercise is encouraged, which also includes carpet bowls, and board games to promote mental stimulation. There is one member of the gym staff who is trained to offer chair-based exercise, and, on an ad hoc basis, he holds these sessions whenever he is available. It is hoped that more instructors will be trained to offer this activity in the future.

6.3.4 In April 2023 a new post was created to identify and assist the neurodiverse prisoners of which there are many (approx. 28%) at The Verne. This has been of assistance to the staff and officers who are now more able to understand why some of the prisoners at times display odd and somewhat irrational and unexplainable behaviour.



## **7. Progression and resettlement**

### **7.1 Education, library**

7.1.1 Weston College has the contract to provide education and vocational training at The Verne; the current contract runs until March 2025. The courses now offered include functional skills in maths and English (entry levels 1-3 and levels 1 and 2 respectively). There has been a concerted effort by Weston this year to make sure all prisoners have taken a diagnostic test to ascertain their ability and to enrol them on one of these courses if they have not reached the required level. This is often unpopular with prisoners but is a necessary step for them to reach the required levels for employment on release. Other courses offered include Sage accounting, an NVQ in food preparation and business start-up (up to Level 2). There are also qualifications in waste management and horticulture. Music and art are very popular but are no longer accredited courses, rather being aimed at encouraging wellbeing. There were 23 Koestler Arts (arts in criminal justice) awards of £100 given to prisoners this year.

7.1.2 There are 36 students studying for Open University degrees. Two students achieved a first-class degree, one in science and the other in business environment, and another student achieved a master's degree in psychology. A further 20 students are studying educational and vocational studies through the Prisoners' Education Trust.

7.1.3 The library is run by Weston College. There are two staff and five prisoner orderlies. It is open all-day Monday - Friday, a half day on Saturday and one evening per week. Fifteen prisoners are allowed in at a time and the upstairs area is now used by the Shannon Trust (to teach reading) and for craft work. There is a wide variety of fiction books, reference books and CDs.

### **7.2 Vocational training, work**

7.2.1 Several vocational courses are offered including mentoring/employability, construction skills, painting and decorating, health and safety, food hygiene, barbering and industrial cleaning. A new course, stone masonry, was introduced during the year.

7.2.2 The wings offer the largest number of paid jobs (cleaning, servery and laundry) others include gardening, kitchens, waste management, window cleaning, wood mill, spray painting, library assistance, mentoring, peer support work, breakfast pack filling, television repair, leather work and textiles.

### **7.3 Offender management, progression**

7.3.1 Those prisoners required to pursue the Horizon or Kaizen programmes for prisoners convicted of sexual offences need to go to other prisons to access them. This is unpopular, as there is a feeling that they may not be able to return to The Verne at the conclusion of the course but for many it is a necessity to fulfil their sentence plans. The Verne was unsuccessful in an application for funding to run the Horizon programme. The Board views this as very unfortunate, as 128 prisoners (nearly one quarter of the prison population) were released from The Verne during the year – the great majority of these had not completed a programme.

7.3.2 The offender management unit (OMU) continues to be understaffed. In July 2023 the profile was for eight Probation Officers and four Prison Officers working as POMs. The actual figures were five Probation Officers and seven Prison Officers. The Probation officers are obliged to rely heavily on agency workers and temporary posts.

7.3.3 At the beginning of July 2023, the backlog for OASys (Offender Assessment System) assessments was 45 with three completed during the month. There was also a backlog of 168 OASys reviews with nine completed. Delays in probation hearings cause anxiety and stress to prisoners and can, on occasion, result in their sentences being extended.

## **7.4 Family contact**

7.4.1 Visits to The Verne take place three times per week. To receive a visit, a prisoner must be approved on the internal HMPPS computer system. Visits can be booked online or if the visitor does not have access to a computer, this can be done by phone or by post. The Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) has taken over from Barnado's as the visits organising body. Family days commenced in August 2022 and are all day visits, and visits with children alternate with family days for adults. The Verne Art department have painted frescoes on the walls of the visits area to make it a much more welcoming place. Social video calls allow online contact via a secure platform.

7.4.2 Prisoners on the basic level of the incentives scheme may enter the ballot by which family visits are allocated but their contact level is taken into consideration.

## **7.5 Resettlement planning**

7.5.1 Following an inspection in February 2020, HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) reported that The Verne has no action plan covering all areas of reoffending. However, when The Verne was re-roled as a category C prison in July 2018, it was not envisaged that any of the prisoners would be released directly from the establishment and, as a result, no funding was made available for this purpose. The Ministry of Justice has still not made any funding available, even though the number released from the Verne annually is now nearly a quarter of the prison population (128/600). The Verne allocated one of its staff members to work on resettlement but with funding taken from other areas of the prison budget. Unfortunately, the person allocated to resettlement left the prison during the year, as did the Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) advisor; these posts have now been filled but there was a brief hiatus in the service.

7.5.2 Prisoners due for release are given review checklists to fill in to help prepare them at six months, twelve weeks and four weeks prior to release. They are helped to arrange accommodation, obtain a citizenship card and birth certificate, acquire a national insurance number, prepare a CV, contact DWP (for benefits), etc. However, opening a bank account and acquiring a driving licence remain a problem as a permanent address other than a prison is required. (The Board understands that there is now a scheme for Basic Bank Accounts for prisoners.)

7.5.3 The Board understands that 128 prisoners were subject to conditional release during the reporting period (77 prisoners in the previous year). This is a very significant number for an establishment which is funded as a training, not a resettlement, prison - especially given the shortage of staff in the offender management unit (see 7.3.2).

## 8. The work of the IMB

### Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	13
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	8 (with two in training)
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	9 (with three in training)
Total number of visits to the establishment	253
Total number of shifts on the 0800-telephone line	0
Total number of segregation reviews attended	19

### Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	7	5
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	3	9
C	Equality	2	4
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	3	14
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	9	3
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	3	9
F	Food and kitchens	0	7
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	7	12
H1	Property within the establishment	3	7
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	8	7
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	5	5
I	Sentence management, including HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	5	10
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	2	7
K	Transfers	2	5
L	Miscellaneous	8	17
	Total number of applications	67	121

# Appendix A

## Equality and diversity: further data

<b>Table A1: age profile</b>		
Age range	Number	Percentage
18-29	47	8
30-39	99	16
40-49	116	19
50-59	153	25
60-69	113	19
70-79	57	9
80+	21	3
TOTAL	606	

<b>Table A2: ethnic background</b>		
	Number	Percentage
White E/W/S/NI	465	77
White other	25	4
Asian	28	5
Black	42	7
Chinese	7	1
White gypsy/ Irish traveller	28	5
Mixed black/ white Caribbean	9	1
Undisclosed	2	<1
Total	606	

<b>Table A3: sexual orientation</b>		
	Number	Percentage
Heterosexual	497	82
Gay/lesbian	24	4
Bi-sexual	28	5
Not disclosed	22	4
Not known	32	5
Other	6	<1
TOTAL	609	



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