



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP The Verne

**For reporting year
1 August 2023 to 31 July 2024**

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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 and 1881, 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 men's category C (for those who present a moderate risk) adult training prison, operated by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), for prisoners convicted of sexual offences (PCoSO).

2.3 The certified normal accommodation (the number of prisoners a prison can hold without being crowded) is 604¹; 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. The prisoner accommodation is described in 5.1, below.

2.4 Weston College provides most of the vocational and educational opportunities. These include tiling, bricklaying and a barber shop, as well as art and music. These are housed in the older 'casemates' (viz. rooms in the wall of the original fortress) part of the estate, as are the art room, library and multi-faith centre. Sports facilities at The Verne include:

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

¹ 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 Main findings

Safety

- From the Board's observations, The Verne remains a prison in which the great majority of its residents generally feel safe. Some disorderly behaviour during the reporting year may be attributed to the increased intake of recently sentenced and younger men, who have little or no experience of prison.

Fair and humane treatment

- In the Board's view, prisoners are treated in a fair and humane way. Particular attention is paid to the needs of those with protected characteristics (such as age, disability, race, religion, sex, gender reassignment and sexual orientation, which it is unlawful to discriminate against).
- Regrettably, the key worker scheme is barely functioning.

Health and wellbeing

- From the Board's observations, Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust continues to provide effective healthcare despite the considerable problems caused by damage to its building (see 6.1.3 below).
- The Board recognises that the social care suite, in Dorset wing, has made a significant contribution to the wellbeing of elderly prisoners. The Board believes that an end-of-life care facility could make a similar contribution.

Progression and resettlement

- The Board welcomes the appointment of staff dedicated to resettlement. However, it recognises that The Verne remains a training prison but, with over 100 leaving the prison annually, more needs to be done about resettlement. In addition, a programme aimed at reducing the risk of re-offending needs to be offered.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- When will the Minister consider establishing an end-of-life care facility at HMP The Verne (see 6.4.2)?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- When will HMPPS ensure funding for an alternative accommodation for the healthcare unit?
- When will HMPPS expedite the introduction of a sex offence programme at The Verne?

TO THE GOVERNOR

- When will the Governor ensure that the kitchen roof is repaired as a matter of urgency (see 5.1.7)?

3.3 Response to the previous year's report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
The Board invites the Minister to ensure adequate funding for the resettlement role currently undertaken by HMP The Verne.	A band 4 resettlement post has been created to support prisoners with accommodation, banking and employment matters.	Two information, advice and guidance (IAG) advisors have now been employed (see 7.5.1).
The Board urges HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) to recognise the efforts made by the senior management team to provide a resettlement service, despite the absence of dedicated funding.	Not commented on in the Ministerial response.	The Board has received from HMPPS no recognition of the efforts made to provide a resettlement service in the absence of dedicated funding.
The Board encourages the Governor to continue the search for further employment opportunities for The Verne prisoners.	The Governor outlined his proposal for expanding purposeful activities generally.	A commendable increase in the number of work opportunities.

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 an intolerance of anti-social behaviour. Their property is collected and stored, and 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 and the chaplaincy. Prisoners receive talks from representatives of protected interests (see 5.4.1, below), from Listeners (prisoners trained by the Samaritans to offer peer support) 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 six deaths in custody during the reporting period: none appeared to be self-inflicted or aroused suspicion.

4.2.2 Prisoners who threaten self-harm are placed on an assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) plan. They are carefully monitored (continuously, 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 attends these reviews when possible to monitor the monthly audit of the relevant documents and ensure they are fully and correctly completed.

4.2.3 Table 4.2.3 indicates a rise in the number of ACCTs over the past two years. This may be attributed to the increased intake of recently sentenced and younger men, who have little or no experience of prison.

Table 4.2.3

Key: ACCT: assessment, care in custody and teamwork (which supports prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide); BM: behaviour monitoring; CSIP: challenge, support and intervention plan (used to support and manage prisoners who pose an increased risk of violence)

	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22
ACCT	138	109	53
BM	94	108	133
CSIP	248	214	16

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

4.3.1 Table 4.3.1 summarises the instances of disruptive behaviour that were reported to the security department.

Table 4.3.1: Reportable incidents

SIM cards/memory devices' finds	0	
Drugs' finds	3	
Alcohol finds	3	
Self-harm incidents	140	
Incidence of assault	12	
Key/lock incidents	40	
Damage to property	22	
Sub total		220
Deaths in custody	6	
Tool/implement loss	6	
Disorder	0	
Food refusal	3	
Total		235

4.3.2 Of the 140 reported incidents of self-harm, 47 were attributable to one individual; a further 32 incidents were caused by seven prisoners. The more serious type of reportable incident results in a prisoner being charged and subject to an adjudication (see Table 4.3.2). If the charge is upheld, sanctions are imposed, which include cellular confinement, forfeit of privileges and loss of earnings.

Table 4.3.2: Adjudications

Alcoholic intoxication	0
Unauthorised possession	91
Damage to property other than his own	16
Disrespect	3
Assault or threatening behaviour	49
Disobedience	37
Fighting	12
Endangers health or safety	15
Obstruction	1
Administering controlled drug	26
TOTAL	250

From discussions with other IMBs, the Board remains satisfied that the above data are indicative of a prison in which acts of violence and indiscipline are relatively rare. Each wing has a (prisoner) violence reduction representative. They, along with staff, seek to de-escalate incidents as they arise.

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, such as, for example, arguments on the wing or challenging negative behaviour. A CSIP will provide additional support for prisoners who are believed to be vulnerable or have

been the victim of an alleged assault or are at risk of being bullied. Following an investigation by the safer communities team, 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 (BM in Table 4.2.1, above): 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. (94 BMs were initiated following CSIPs in the reporting year.)
- A CSIP 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 that 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 this is suspected by staff, it triggers covert behaviour monitoring (BM). Moving the bully to another wing has occasionally proved effective. Occasionally, prisoners who demonstrate that they cannot adhere to the non-violent regime at The Verne have been transferred to other prisons.

4.5 Use of force

4.5.1 Force was used on 32 occasions in the reporting period; the reasons are listed in Table 4.5.1, below. The twofold increase over the previous year could be due to an increased intake of prisoners unfamiliar with prison life (see 4.2.3, above).

Table 4.5.1: Use of force

	2023-2024	2022-2023
Preventing self-harm	3	4
Non-compliance	17	8
Assault	5	2
Good order or discipline	0	0
Other (escorting)	7	1
TOTAL	32	15

4.6 Preventing illicit items

4.6.1 The six finds of illicit items are listed in Table 4.3.1, above. 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 wings. Each of the six wings - Arne, Abbotsbury, Bincombe, Blandford, Corfe and Chesil - house 80 prisoners, on first and second floors. The rooms do not have sanitation, but prisoners have 24-hour access to WCs, washbasins and showers. Each cell is equipped with a small television and a kettle. On the ground floor of each unit, there is a laundry, servery, dining area, communal area and a prison staff office. Those prisoners employed in cleaning have maintained a very high standard of hygiene within all wings.

5.1.2 Dorset wing is situated in the old casemate part of the prison. All ten dormitories are on the ground floor. This wing houses prisoners with mobility issues and social care needs. Two of the dormitories have been reconfigured for new, enhanced social care accommodation. Each consists of eight separate rooms with hospital-style beds and lifting hoists. These two dormitories have their own shower, WC and wash basin. There is a pull cord alarm to summon assistance.

5.1.3 Evershot wing comprises of 24 low-level-type pods with a WC and shower. It has its own kitchen area and day room, as well as a staff office. Evershot is occupied by trusted prisoners. Fleet wing, still under construction, will comprise 40 pods in a two-storey unit. Although work progressed well during the year, the opening date of autumn 2024 was not met due to issues with the main contractor.

5.1.4 There were repeated heating boiler failures during the reporting year. The failures during the winter particularly affected Chesil and Corfe wings, the healthcare unit and the administration block. Hot water was frequently in short supply. Temporary boilers were used to provide heating whilst repairs were carried out. Temporary portable radiators were supplied as required. The Governors provided updates to prisoners on the progress of remedial works. Morale inevitably suffered during cold spells.

5.1.5 Most prisoners on the enhanced (top) or standard (middle) levels of the incentives scheme are allowed to wear their own clothes (although black garments are not allowed, due to the resemblance to prison officers' uniform). Each wing has its own laundry, run by two prisoners. Each inmate is allowed two bags of laundry per week. The laundry system works well and there are few complaints.

5.1.6 The kitchen, situated in the main accommodation block, provides three meals per day. The Board is impressed with the variety of menus offered, catering for all prisoner requirements on an allowance of £3.01 per head (set nationally in July 2024). These include allergen-free, gluten-free, halal, kosher and vegan meals. The kitchen also provides food for religious festivals. The food is of a high standard and is tasted most days by the Duty Governor and a Board member, if on a monitoring visit. There are few complaints, although any that are made tend to concern portion sizes.

5.1.7 Whilst some progress has been made in ordering replacement kitchen equipment, the fabric of the building is in a very poor state, with rainwater leaking

through the flat roof and causing extensive areas of mould and peeling paint. The Board strongly urges that this should be remedied as a soon as possible.

5.1.8 The Verne is fortunate in having extensive grounds, some of which are given over to growing vegetables. Three new greenhouses have been erected and raised beds have been constructed to enable disabled prisoners to join in with the production of food. Over the summer growing period, an average of 400 lettuces per week and five other salads and vegetables were provided. More than 250kg of produce was supplied to the kitchen. A total of 24 prisoners were involved in the growing of the produce. This contribution continues to be most valuable, especially given the recent sharp increase in food costs.

5.2 Segregation

5.2.1 The care and separation unit (CSU, or Swanage unit) consists of eight cells with in-cell sanitation. The unit has a shower, an outside exercise yard and a small library. Board members visit the unit during their monitoring visits. Prisoners located on the unit under Rule 45 (segregated for the maintenance of good order or discipline, or for their own protection) have access to a television, if appropriate. IMB members are alerted by email of any new arrival. During monitoring visits, we speak to prisoners in their cells. The IMB checks documents in the CSU. These record the visits from staff mandated to attend (such as the Duty Governor, chaplain and nurse).

Table 5.2.1: Segregation numbers held

Rule 45 (GOoD)	42
Rule 53 (waiting for initial adjudication)	24
Rule 55 (segregation after adjudication)	7

5.2.2 Of the 42 prisoners held under Rule 45, a proportion were there to safeguard their physical and/or mental health. Some prisoners who are self-harming will be under constant watch. IMB members attend adjudications whenever possible.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

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

5.3.2 According to the charity, Prison Reform Trust: 'Your key worker is a member of prison staff whose responsibility it is to support you throughout the custodial period. They should meet with you an average of 45 minutes per week.' However, the Board believes that the national target of one key worker session per week is rather ambitious and not practical. The Governors have subsequently set a more realistic target of one session every four weeks.

5.3.3 The Verne has 117 trained key workers, which includes most of the prison officers and governors. Each has been allocated five or six prisoners. In practice, key worker appointments are often cancelled to provide cover for staff shortages, particularly with regard to bed watches. For example, on 23 July 2024, 171 sessions were allocated but only 20 took place, which is a compliance rate of just 11.5%.

5.3.4 The Board believes there has been a failure to manage key working during the year and this is unfair to prisoners. However, we are pleased to note the recent appointment of a senior custodial manager to oversee the key worker scheme and we look forward to monitoring improvements in this area.

5.4 Equality and diversity

5.4.1 In October 2017, the [Lammy Review](#) recognised that other groups, besides black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners, namely the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities, also required a voice². Consequently, a wide range of minorities is represented at The Verne, including those referenced above, as well as LGBTQ+ prisoners.

5.4.2 Each of the protected nine protected characteristics (age; religion or belief; race; sexual orientation; sex; disability; marriage and civil partnership; and gender reassignment) is overseen by a senior manager, a liaison officer and at least one prisoner representative. Forums are held regularly for all protected characteristics, and also for armed services veterans; each forum is chaired by a Governor. Prisoners are encouraged to organise special events and religious festivals, often bringing in outside groups.

5.4.3 Reports of discrimination incidents are investigated by means of the discrimination incident report forms (DIRF) system and are considered at the monthly diversity equality action team meetings (DIAT). There were 24 DIRFS submitted during the period May-June 2024: six were upheld, eight were not upheld and ten were redirected to the usual complaints' procedure. There has been some unease as to the effectiveness of the handling of DIRFs, as a result of which a DIRF scrutiny panel has been formed, comprising officers and prisoner representatives.

5.4.4 In Annex B, Table B1 gives the age profile averaged over the reporting period. The median age was approximately 52 – little change from last year. Ethnicity is recorded in Table B2: the percentage of prisoners declaring themselves to be white is also little changed. Declared sexual orientation is given in Table B3. Seven prisoners are at different stages of transition from male to female. This group appears to be well integrated into the prison community.

5.4.5 The IMB remains confident that HMP The Verne effectively monitors and addresses the needs of all communities represented in the prison. The staff appear to be conscientious and humane in their respect for all prisoners with protected characteristics.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

5.5.1 The managing chaplain and the Catholic and Muslim chaplains are full-time employees, while the Anglican and Free Church chaplains are part-time. They are supported by Anglican, Sikh, Free Church and Hindu contracted staff. There are also several volunteers, including those from the Catholic and Anglican churches, plus the Salvation Army, amongst others. They work as a multi-faith group, with each chaplain supporting prisoners of all faiths and none.

5.5.2 The Prison Service recognises 18 different religions. Every prisoner who has registered as a particular faith is entitled to one hour per week corporate worship and

² [Equality and Human Rights Commission: Protected characteristics](#)

one hour study, for which they can be excused from work. The breakdown of religion declared by prisoners in July 2024 can be found in Table B4 in Annex B.

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 have been successful in obtaining external donations to subsidise extra food for Christmas and Eid, as well as the Traveller Festival and Black History Month. All special meals were prepared by the kitchen.

5.5.4 Chaplains are highly visible, walking around the wings every day. Usual duties include: looking after the welfare and spiritual needs of prisoners; attending ACCT reviews, adjudications, inductions and visiting prisoners in the CSU. The chaplaincy is usually involved when there is a death of a family member. There are around 6-8 phone calls received each month concerning death or end-of-life stage for prisoner family members. One of the chaplains informs the prisoner concerned as soon as possible. Where possible, funerals are attended by the prisoner concerned, with an escort and a representative from the chaplaincy team.

5.5.5 There were an average of 600 attendees at worship per month (namely, 125-150 per week) during the year and about a quarter of the prisoners regularly attend faith services. There are also regular faith classes and social events.

5.5.6 The Board is aware of the very high regard that The 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 Incentives schemes

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

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 the prison's values. Extra privileges offered to enhanced prisoners include access to family visits; two social video calls (these allow online contact, via a secure platform, in one session per month, but more by application); entitlement to increased spends; and access to their own clothes. A prisoner on the standard incentive level is one who complies with expected standards and engages in purposeful activity, but 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 in the way the scheme is operated.

5.6.3 In July 2024, three prisoners were on the basic level, 73 (12%) on standard and 530 (87%) on enhanced. This reflects the general standard of good behaviour at The Verne.

5.7 Complaints

5.7.1 In the reporting period, 1254 complaints were logged (the corresponding figure for the previous year was 1161). Complaints boxes are emptied daily, with various complaint forms and confidential access envelopes available. The process continues to be well managed, with over 91% of the complaints being responded to within the allocated timeframe of seven days. A sample of responses seen by the

Board were invariably courteous and considered. In Table 5.7.1, below, offender management unit (OMU) complaints included: access to prison offender managers (POMs), the OASys (offender assessment system), parole board and transfers. Residential complaints included: regime, wing jobs, cleaning and anti-social behaviour.

Table 5.7.1: Most numerous subjects of complaint

OMU	191	15%
Residential	170	14%
Property	117	9%
Staff	100	8%
Maintenance	83	7%

5.7.2 An additional 159 complaints were submitted by The Verne prisoners for the attention of other establishments, mostly regarding property missing after transfer.

5.8 Property

5.8.1 Property loss within the prison resulted in only four out of 104 applications (prisoners' written representations to the Board). However, the loss of property during transfer from another prison is a continuing problem and prompted 13 applications (see also 5.7.2). These complaints are difficult to deal with as they involve communications with other prisons, often with limited success.

5.8.2 The property that prisoners are allowed in their cells is prescribed at a national level, with local variations specified by The Verne Governor. No devices are allowed that might give access to the phone system or the Internet. All wings, other than Dorset, have in-cell phones, with the calls strictly controlled. Television sets are provided as standard, other than for the very few prisoners on basic regime.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare in general

6.1.1 From the Board's monitoring, The Verne healthcare service continues to provide excellent, high-quality care for all its prisoners through its contract with Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust.

6.1.2 There are now over 600 prisoners at the prison, of whom 54% are aged over 50 and 33% aged over 60. A more elderly population means that many of the prisoners have complex health and social care needs. Some have multiple diagnoses of long- term or terminal illnesses.

6.1.3 The healthcare building is in a deplorable state, with damp damage, peeling plaster, tiles and ceiling plaster falling down and large cracks in the walls inside and outside. Most of the buildings are not fit for use. By the end of the reporting year, the healthcare manager and deputy manager had to be relocated to a small room in the reception block, at the opposite end of the prison. This causes problems as they do not have enough computers in that room, and they have no privacy for calls and teleconferences. Nurses also use this room for assessing new prisoners, so the manager and deputy have to leave, sometimes for a whole afternoon. **There is an urgent need for temporary healthcare accommodation. In the longer term, a new facility should be provided.**

6.1.4 There is also a small healthcare facility on Dorset wing; the GP and nurses run clinics there for prisoners housed there. At times, other nurses have to use this facility when the main healthcare building is out of use.

6.2 Physical healthcare

6.2.1 Medical care is provided by a part-time GP, who works 29 hours each week and is employed on a subcontract and not by the Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust. There is a team of nurses and nurse practitioners, some of whom have prescribing rights, who work from 7.30am until 5.30pm. Visiting clinicians provide dentistry, podiatry, optometry and physiotherapy. There are X-ray and ultrasound facilities in the prison.

6.2.2 Telemedicine calls can be arranged, with Airedale NHS Foundation Trust, to specialist consultants for outpatient appointments. This has helped to reduce the number of visits that officers have had to make with prisoners to local outpatient clinics. However, there is increasing demand for these outside Oxleas' contractual arrangements. Urgent hospital referrals still have to be made and the need for escorts to outside hospitals puts a burden on prison staffing.

6.2.3 Flu and Covid vaccinations are offered according to national guidelines and there is a good uptake. Screening is offered for bowel cancer, abdominal aortic aneurysm, diabetic eye conditions and chlamydia. All prisoners are eligible for annual testing for blood-borne viruses (HIV, hepatitis B and C); the healthcare team has worked hard to offer this to all prisoners, with help from the Hepatitis C Trust.

It is hoped that the national lung cancer screening project will start soon at The Verne; about 200 prisoners are eligible to take part.

6.2.4 With regard to sexual health, clinicians from the genital urinary medicine clinic visit monthly. They have some long-standing cases and prisoners can self-refer. Condoms are available. Since accommodation at The Verne is mainly on open spurs, with shared washing facilities, some sexual activity is inevitable (see 6.6.1, below).

6.3 Mental health

6.3.1 The mental health team at The Verne has a caseload of around 70 prisoners. More group work is being done so there is less need for regular appointments with the mental health team, but prisoners can ask to see a mental health nurse. A psychologist visits for four days each week, while a psychiatrist visits one day each week. In addition, there is a resident prison psychologist who addresses offending behaviour.

6.4 Neurodiversity

6.4.1 In the summer of 2023, a neurodiversity support manager (NSM), who is employed by the prison and reports to the Governor, was appointed. She has been responsible for identifying prisoners' neurodiverse needs, including those associated with autism, ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) and dyslexia, of which there were found to be many. She formed a baseline of these numbers when she started and has found very little variation in the figures since. Based on self-declaration, there were found to be 54 prisoners with autism; 52 with ADHD; and 108 with dyslexia. Prisoners with these conditions account for almost one third of The Verne population. These prisoners are issued with a 'hidden disability' lanyard to wear (daisy lanyards, which are widely recognised).

6.4.2 The NSM runs a support group for prisoners with autism, who have reported to the Board that they find it very helpful to better understand why they think and act the way they do. Many of the prisoners with dyslexia have been assisted in learning to read and write by bodies such as the Shannon Trust and they have now been issued with equipment to help them. For those with ADHD, assistance is more problematic, as many of them (over 80%) have used drugs and have been subject to, or have used, violence associated with their offences. However, the mental health and drug and alcohol misuse teams can offer assistance and treatment with this, too.

6.4.3 Training on autism, ADHD and dyslexia has been organised for the staff and for IMB members and has been very helpful and well received.

6.5 Social care

6.5.1 The Board is very pleased to report that in September 2023 the 16-bed social care suite opened, with care workers (non-prison staff) 24 hours a day (see 5.1.2). This unit houses some of the most sick and disabled prisoners, who would otherwise need to take up an outside care home or hospital bed, with the attendant bed-watch officers taken from the prison staff complement. The care suite beds have been fully occupied ever since the unit opened.

Table 6.5.1 Bed-watches

Month	Number	Hours
August	8	1911
September	8	1857
October	11	2283
November	6	1045
December	3	478
January	7	385
February	3	272
March	2	52
April	11	1154
May	7	1587
June	4	702
July	8	1660

6.5.2 Although the care suite is a most welcome addition to the prison, the Board still feels that there should be a place for an end-of-life care suite that is staffed by a trained nurse 24 hours a day. There have been six deaths among the Verne prisoner population this year. Other prisoners have spent several weeks in hospital, with bed-watch officers required for each shift (see Table 6.4.1). This amounted to 13,386 hours of officer time not spent on essential activities such as key working.

6.5.3 There have also been numerous calls to the ambulance service to attend sick and elderly men during the night, which could often have been attended to by a trained nurse or paramedic. The Board suggests that a resident nurse or paramedic during the night, attached to an end-of-life suite, would be a cost-effective way of reducing calls to the ambulance service.

6.5.4 The older population at The Verne brings its own challenges. Being in prison, especially for those serving longer sentences, accelerates ageing and, since many of The Verne prisoners have lengthy sentences, it is important to keep them physically and mentally fit, healthy and occupied for as long as possible. Employment, wherever possible, is encouraged and many of the older prisoners do take on some form of prison employment when it is offered.

6.5.5 There is also a full programme of physical activities available for those men who are not able to work. These activities are organised and supervised by a team of physical training instructors (PTIs) and have proved very popular. The PTIs also run an over-60s gym session weekly, which has a membership of 25-30.

6.5.6 For the less able prisoners, the PTIs have an indoor programme of gentler, chair-based exercises, as well as board games and jigsaws.

6.6 Time out of cell

Regime

6.6.1 The Board has observed during the reporting year that many prisoners are arriving from local and remand prisons sooner after sentencing than they have in past years. For many prisoners, their experience will have been a few weeks only in prisons with strict 'lock up' regimes, shared cells and very little time spent outside in

association. Because of its location, structure and layout, The Verne is able to offer a more moderate regime, with mostly single cells and more time spent outside. The prisoners are locked into their landings at night, but can associate freely with other prisoners on that landing. While this can ensure a more 'normal' life for most prisoners, the Board understands that it has led to more bullying, coercive behaviour and some grooming of more vulnerable prisoners for drugs, vapes and sexual favours. This, in its turn, has led to more instances of debt and an increased number of distressed prisoners being placed on ACCTs.

6.6.2 Time out of the wings is restricted to two hours each morning and 1 hour 45 minutes in the afternoon each day of the week. During these times, the prisoners can mix with prisoners from other wings and benefit from the gardens in the accommodation block area. Prisoners are also allowed a short period of association in the evenings, from Monday to Thursday. At any time and at short notice, any of these association and outside cell times may be reduced if there are staff shortages. Staffing constraints have meant that there is no evening association at the weekend.

6.6.3 During these times out of cell, prisoners who are employed will be at work or in education, but others are free to use the library, attend religious services or join in activities organised by the PTIs. Each Monday afternoon, they offer a 5K or 10K timed run and, on Bank Holidays, an organised timed 10K run takes place. The PTIs encourage prisoners to join in, as the benefits to mental, physical and social health are well demonstrated in the running groups throughout the country. A running course of 1K is offered to get the men started. They would like to offer an organised, timed 'Park Run' on Saturday mornings, as takes place all over the country and also in many prisons but, unfortunately, the Park Run organisers will not allow prisoners convicted of sexual offences (PCoSO) to be affiliated.

Gymnasium

6.6.4 The gymnasium is housed in one of the older buildings in the prison. The training equipment is modern and well maintained. There is also a large sports hall, which can accommodate basketball, volleyball and spin classes, etc. Football matches are arranged on the sports field, as well as runs in the extensive grounds.

6.6.5 All prisoners, other than those in the CSU, are able to access the gym at some point in the day. Prisoners in full-time work or education activity are limited to the hours of 6pm-7pm during the week, which has caused some resentment.

6.6.6 In June 2024, 518 prisoners were registered with the gym (86% of the prison roll), while 270 attended at least one activity during the month (45% of the population and 52% of those registered). Compared with life outside, these are high attendance figures. The enthusiasm and drive of the supervisory staff make a significant contribution to The Verne prisoners' wellbeing.

6.7 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

6.7.1 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 holds two meetings each month in the prison to assist with maintaining successful abstinence. Cannabis and cocaine use is also addressed.

6.7.2 Many prisoners, especially the elderly, are permitted to hold their prescribed medications 'in-possession'. However, the pharmacy also does daily drugs'

distributions, as many medications are not appropriate to be held overnight, especially by the more vulnerable prisoners, who can be bullied into handing them over to others. Many prescription medications are very tradeable; they can be used for debt repayment or simply for illicit use.

6.8 Soft skills

6.8.1 Weston College has given all their learners an individual learning plan (ILP), in which they set targets for their course. Included as part of the ILP is a section for embedded employability targets, which are in line with the ten Ministry of Justice employability skills (such as, for example, communication, teamwork, creativity, adaptability, etc). They set targets to develop these skills within whatever subject they are learning.

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 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 College to make sure that all prisoners take a diagnostic test to ascertain their ability and to enrol them on one of these courses if they have not reached the required level. They are about halfway through the process. Music and art remain very popular but are no longer accredited courses rather being aimed at encouraging wellbeing and creativity. There were 34 Koestler Arts (arts in criminal justice) awards of £100 given to prisoners this year. The Verne sends in the most applications of any UK prison. The Shannon Trust helps with Maths and English and a full-time reading specialist has been employed.

7.1.2 There are 37 students studying for Open University degrees. Two students successfully completed their degrees during the year. An Open University graduation ceremony took place at the Verne on 25 January for three students who completed their degrees in the previous year: one BSc and two BA degrees. A further 53 students were accepted for educational and vocational studies through the Prisoners' Education Trust.

7.1.3 The library is run by Weston College. There are two part-time staff and five prisoner orderlies. It is open all-day, Monday to Friday, a half-day on Saturday and two evenings 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 legal business. There is a wide variety of fiction and reference books, CDs and DVDs which are supplemented by bookshelves on the wings. The librarians try to order in any special book requests.

7.2 Vocational training and work

7.2.1 Several accredited vocational courses are offered, including mentoring/employability, construction skills, painting and decorating, health and safety, food hygiene and catering, bricklaying, barbering, performing manufacturing operations (wood mill), industrial cleaning and waste management. Stone masonry was introduced last year and has been a successful addition.

7.2.2 The wings offer the largest number of paid jobs (cleaning, serverly and laundry), while 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. Food packing has received an award for the highest performance in prisons in the country. A very talented woodworker has been providing high-quality wooden bowls for sale at the Jailhouse Café in aid of its charity. The gardens have doubled the number of jobs available and have provided the prison with salad items throughout the summer. They have also grown bedding plants to enhance the prison gardens.

7.2.3 Despite a clear improvement over the reporting period, the Board hopes that the drive for more purposeful activities will continue.

7.3 Offender management, progression

7.3.1 Prisoners required to pursue the Horizon or Kaizen programmes for those convicted of sexual offences need to go to other prisons to access them, as they have not previously been provided at The Verne. This is unpopular, as prisoners fear that they may not be able to return to The Verne at the conclusion of the course. Such a move, however, is necessary to fulfil the prisoners' sentence plans. The Verne has now been given the funding to run its own programme, which the Board views as very a positive step, as 119 prisoners (one-fifth of the prison population) were released from The Verne during the year, the great majority of whom had not completed a sex offences programme.

7.3.2 The offender management unit (OMU) continues to be understaffed, although the situation improved during the reporting year. While the expected number of posts continues to be for eight probation officers and four prison officers working as POMs (prison offender managers), there are six probation officers and eight prison officers attached to the OMU. However, of these eight prison officers, five are permanent posts and three have been temporarily promoted to support the probation service staff. Because of this shortfall in numbers, the probation officers are obliged to rely heavily on agency workers and staff on temporary loan from HMPs Leyhill and Dartmoor.

7.3.3 OASys (offender assessment system) is used to measure the risks and needs of each offender. At the beginning of July 2024, the backlog for OASys assessments was 21. These comprise mainly prisoners who have no OASys, as they were transferred to The Verne soon after sentencing. There was also a backlog of 134 OASys reviews (these are prisoners who have not had their OASys reviewed in the last two years). This can result in delays to parole hearings, causing anxiety and stress for prisoners, and can result in prisoners serving longer sentences than they might otherwise do.

7.4 Family contact

7.4.1 Social visits to The Verne take place three times per week. To receive a social visit, a prisoner must be approved on the internal HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) computer system. Social visits can be booked online or by phone or post. The Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) is the visits' organising body. This year, a new area to aid visits has opened. Family days with children last all day and alternate with family days for adults. The Verne art department has 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. Storytime Dads (where prisoners record bedtime stories on CD or DVD for their children) was introduced in the course of the year with some success, but many prisoners are denied access to their children and cannot participate.

7.4.2 Prisoners on the basic level of the incentives scheme may enter the ballot by which family social 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)³ reported that The Verne has no action plan covering all areas of resettlement. 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 resettlement planning. The Ministry of Justice has now made funding available, as the number released from The Verne annually is nearly a fifth of the prison population (119 out of 600). The Verne has two staff members who work on resettlement. Two information, advice and guidance (IAG) advisors have now been employed; they help prisoners decide on education goals to increase the chance of employment on release. However, prisoners with long sentences (two-thirds have a sentence of more than ten years) sometimes find it difficult to plan for the future.

7.5.2 Prisoners due for release are given review checklists to help prepare them at six months, 12 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 the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), for benefits, employment, etc. Opening a new basic bank account can now be facilitated through HSBC, but acquiring (or renewing) a driver's licence remains a problem, as a permanent address other than a prison is required. However, this can be done if a family member allows their home address to be used. The prison can arrange up-to-date photos when needed.

A weekly resettlement advisory panel meeting was instituted in the course of the reporting year, when interested parties, such as community POMS, the police, prison POMS and The Verne resettlement team, meet for planning purposes 12 weeks before a prisoner is released.

7.5.3 The Board understands that 119 prisoners were subject to conditional release during the reporting period. This is a very significant number for an establishment that is funded as a training, not a resettlement, prison. It is hoped that the new Fleet wing, which is under construction, will become a focus for the resettlement programme.

³ [Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP The Verne by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons \(para. 4.7\)](#)

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	6 (+3 probationers)
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	8 (+1 probationers)
Total number of visits to the establishment	272
Total number of shifts on the 0800 phone line	0
Total number of segregation reviews observed	25

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	5	4
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives schemes, sanctions	9	4
C	Equality	4	10
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	14	8
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	3	6
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	9	3
F	Food and kitchens	7	4
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	12	9
H1	Property within this establishment	7	4
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	7	13
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	5	3
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorisation	10	12
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	7	10
K	Transfers	5	5
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	17	9
	Total number of applications	121	104

Annex A

Service providers

- Healthcare: Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust
- Social care: Dorset Council
- Maintenance and project services: Gov Facilities Services Limited
- Vocational and educational opportunities: Weston College

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

Annex B

Equality and diversity: further data

Table B1: AGE PROFILE

Age range	Number	Percentage
18-29	52	8.6
30-39	107	17.6
40-49	115	18.9
50-59	132	21.2
60-69	114	18.8
70-79	64	10.6
80+	21	3.4
TOTAL	605	

Table B2: ETHNIC BACKGROUND

	Number	Percentage
White E/W/S/NI	471	77.9
White gypsy/Irish traveller	28	4.6
White other	27	4.5
Asian	20	3.3
Black	38	6.3
Chinese	6	1.0
Mixed black/white		
Caribbean	13	2.1
Undisclosed	2	<1
TOTAL	605	

Table B3: SEXUAL ORIENTATION

	Number	Percentage
Heterosexual	488	80.7
Gay/lesbian	23	3.8
Bi-sexual	22	3.6
Not known/not disclosed	65	10.7
Other	7	1.2
TOTAL	605	

Table B4: DECLARED RELIGION

	Number	Percentage
Christian	299	49.5
Buddhist	37	6.1
Muslim	30	5.0
Sikh	11	1.8
Other	23	3.8
No religion	204	33.8
TOTAL	604	



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