



Report on an independent review of progress at

HMP Bristol

by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

24–26 June 2024



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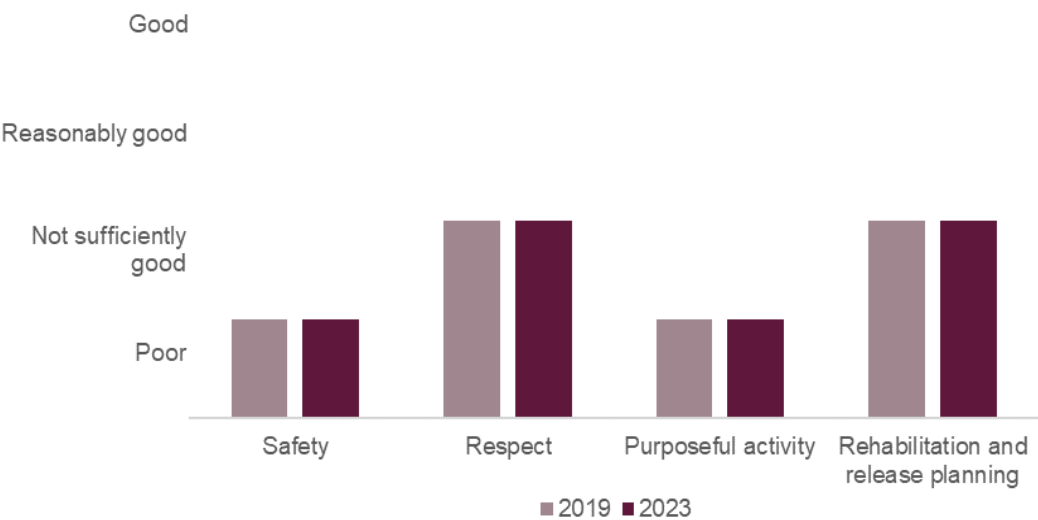
Section 1 Chief Inspector’s summary

- 1.1 HMP Bristol is a category B reception prison holding up to 580 adult men.
- 1.2 This review visit followed up on the concerns we raised at our last inspection of HMP Bristol in 2023.

What we found at our last inspection

- 1.3 At our previous inspections of HMP Bristol in 2019 and 2023 we made the following judgements about outcomes for prisoners.

Figure 1: HMP Bristol healthy prison outcomes in 2019 and 2023
Note: rehabilitation and release planning became ‘preparation for release’ in October 2023.



- 1.4 Bristol has had a very troubled recent history; its conditions were so bad at the previous two inspections that we wrote to the Secretary of State invoking the Urgent Notification process (see Glossary). In 2023 we did this because the prison was one of the most unsafe in the country, with levels of recorded violence – including serious assaults on both staff and prisoners – higher than in most other adult prisons. The prison was understaffed and so most prisoners were locked up for almost 22 hours a day, which undoubtedly contributed to a sense of hopelessness among many. The incidence of self-harm was very high and there had been eight self-inflicted deaths since our last inspection. In addition, one man had also recently been charged with murdering his cellmate.

What we found during this review visit

- 1.5 At this independent review of progress we found the governor and her team had worked hard to stabilise the prison and then made substantial improvements since the inspection. Of the nine areas of concern that we assessed, progress was reasonably good or better in eight and insufficient in just one.
- 1.6 Leaders had addressed the staff shortfalls we saw previously, which had enabled them to run a consistent daily routine for prisoners. The governor had set ambitious targets that all prisoners should be allocated to activity and that attendance should be higher than 80%. While this had not yet been achieved, improved oversight and drive had led to many more prisoners being employed productively during their time at Bristol. This certainly made prisoners feel less frustrated and, alongside other proactive measures, had reduced levels of violence. It was also positive that there was now some better support for prisoners being released back into the community.
- 1.7 The progress made by the governor, her leadership team and staff should be commended; however, this progress is fragile. Violence, while reduced, remains higher than in most other reception prisons and levels of self-harm have not yet come down. To consolidate and build on the gains made that we note in this report, the governor will need continued support from HMPPS.

Charlie Taylor

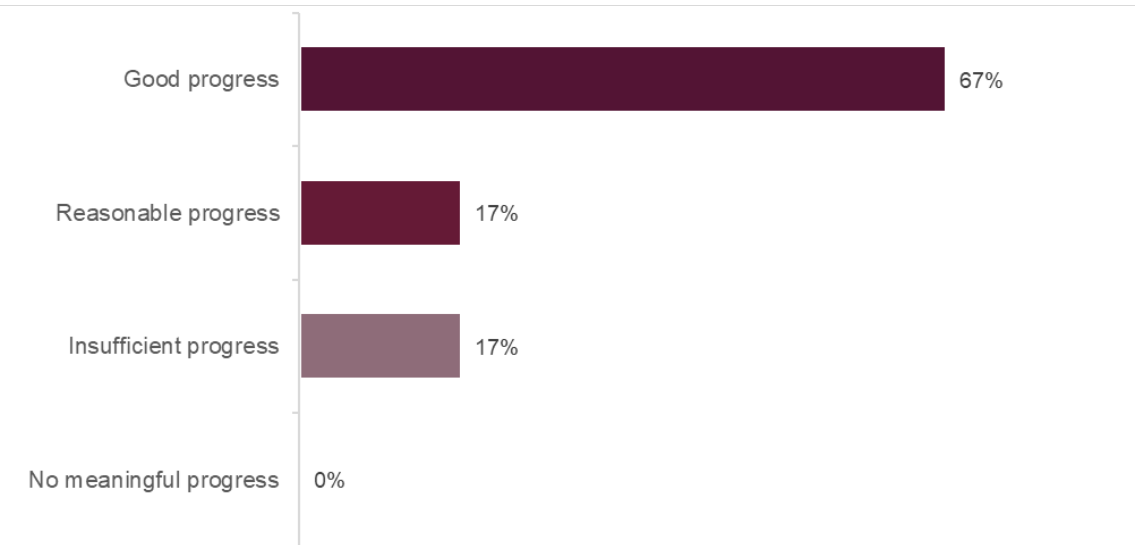
HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

July 2024

Section 2 Key findings

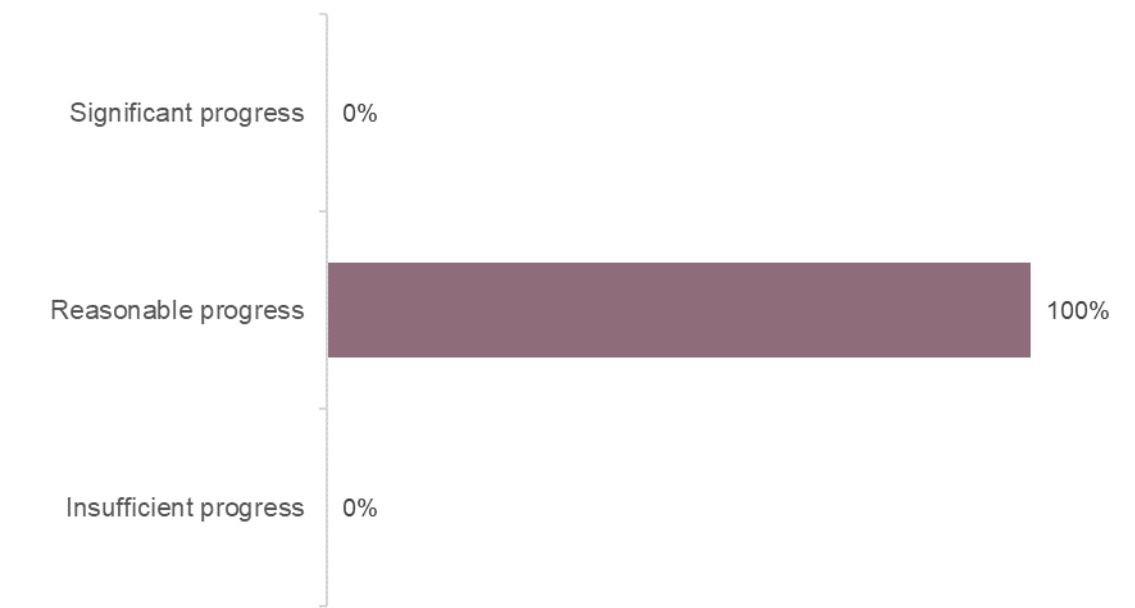
- 2.1 At this IRP visit, we followed up six concerns from our most recent inspection in July 2023 and Ofsted followed up three themes based on their latest inspection of the prison.
- 2.2 HMI Prisons judged that there was good progress in four concerns, reasonable progress in one concern and insufficient progress in one concern.

Figure 2: Progress on HMI Prisons concerns from July 2023 inspection (n=6)
This bar chart excludes any concerns that were followed up as part of a theme within Ofsted's concurrent prison monitoring visit.



- 2.3 Ofsted judged that there was reasonable progress in all three themes.

Figure 3: Progress on Ofsted themes from July 2023 inspection (n=3).



Notable positive practice

2.4 We define notable positive practice as:

Evidence of our expectations being met to deliver particularly good outcomes for prisoners, and/or particularly original or creative approaches to problem-solving.

2.5 Inspectors found no examples of notable positive practice during this independent review of progress.

Section 3 Progress against our concerns and Ofsted themes

The following provides a brief description of our findings in relation to each concern followed up from the full inspection in 2023.

Leadership

Concern: Staffing across the prison was insufficient to ensure the delivery of a safe and purposeful regime. Staff shortages, in particular at officer level and in health care, had restricted significantly the daily regime and other outcomes for prisoners.

- 3.1 Leaders had been successful in addressing shortages of prison officers. The prison was now fully staffed and able to run a consistent daily routine for prisoners. Key activities including education, work and health care appointments were no longer routinely cancelled. This had helped to reduce tensions on the wings and contributed to the lower levels of conflict between prisoners and staff.
- 3.2 There were still significant numbers of staff who were unable to be deployed because of sickness, temporary promotion and restricted duties, which was preventing the prison's delivery of key work (see Glossary). This was disappointing as we found that many prisoners still struggled to get responses and resolution to low-level requests and applications.
- 3.3 Staff vacancies in health care had also reduced, with remaining gaps filled by a combination of regular bank staff and agency workers. The introduction of a new senior nurse development role had improved the career progression routes for nursing staff and the ability of health care leaders to fill vacancies. As a result, access to all health services had improved.
- 3.4 Leaders had put in place more support for new staff to reduce attrition rates. While most new staff were enthusiastic, the weaknesses in national recruitment processes meant a minority were unsuitable for the new role.
- 3.5 We considered that the prison had made good progress in this area.

Encouraging positive behaviour

Concern: Levels of violence were too high. The strategy to make the prison safer was too narrow and failed to address significant underlying causes. This included the absence of clear boundaries for behaviour, ineffective staff-prisoner engagement, and the impact of such a poor regime.

- 3.6 Although rates of violence remained higher than in similar prisons, they had reduced by about a quarter and were continuing to decline. Notably, serious assaults on prisoners and staff had also decreased.
- 3.7 The reduction in violence had, however, been quite recent. Leaders attributed progress to the implementation of several creative initiatives, including the early identification of prisoners in conflict with others through processes to identify gang affiliations, as well as debt management initiatives. These measures were encouraging, but we had concerns about the legitimacy of the recently introduced debt pay-off scheme. Leaders committed to review this initiative.
- 3.8 The incentives policy had been revised, but further development was needed to create more meaningful engagement with prisoners.
- 3.9 Leaders and staff knew prisoners well, and we observed many respectful interactions. Prisoners spoke well of the staff, but we did observe some lower-level poor behaviour going unchallenged, such as men vaping outside of their cells and wearing unsuitable clothing on the exercise yard.
- 3.10 We considered that the prison had made good progress in this area.

Security

Concern: Illicit drugs were readily available to prisoners. Although security measures had improved, not enough had been done to prevent the supply and address the demand for drugs.

- 3.11 Leaders had focused on reducing both the supply of and the demand for drugs with collaborative working between the drugs strategy lead and the head of security. Data and intelligence were used to help leaders understand and respond to the pattern of drug supply and use.
- 3.12 During a recent spike in identified use, relatively small numbers of prisoners had accounted for more than half of the 'under-the-influence' incidents reported. Prisoners who came to notice because of their repeated use were now subject to intervention meetings in which individualised support was identified.
- 3.13 Other initiatives to reduce demand included the introduction of an active group of recovery peer mentors from the substance misuse

team, which included a recovery Insider in reception to signpost new arrivals to the services available. There were regular support groups, some involving community volunteers. Leaders recognised the importance of prisoners having access to purposeful activity and timetabled regular daily activities for men undergoing detoxification.

- 3.14 There was a wide range of security actions to disrupt the supply of drugs into the prison. Leaders had redirected resources away from random mandatory drug testing to augment other actions, such as cell searches. The prison had been successful in resourcing additional netting to improve the defence against throwovers and drones used to get drugs into the site. Leaders were alert to the potential for staff corruption, and there were good working relationships with the police.
- 3.15 We considered that the prison had made good progress in this area.

Suicide and self-harm prevention

Concern: The number of self-inflicted deaths and the rate of reported self-harm were much too high. The poor regime, ineffective relationships with wing staff and a lack of support – for example, a lack of help to support and rebuild family ties – contributed to a sense of hopelessness and despondency among many prisoners.

- 3.16 There had been two additional self-inflicted deaths since our last inspection. Early learning reviews had been conducted, and the lessons learned had been addressed and implemented. Leaders maintained good oversight of the death in custody action plan, which was reviewed frequently, and were preparing for the coroner's inquests that followed the self-inflicted deaths prior to our last inspection.
- 3.17 Although rates of self-harm had reduced in recent months, they remained very high and were almost double the average rate at similar prisons. Since July 2023, there had been 986 incidents of self-harm, with 32 requiring hospital treatment and two investigated as near-fatal incidents.
- 3.18 The monthly safety meeting reviewed relevant data and demonstrated a good understanding of the drivers of self-harm. Most self-harm stemmed from factors similar to other comparable prisons, such as difficulties accessing canteen and property, and high levels of mental ill health.
- 3.19 Although reviews for prisoners at risk of self-harm or suicide on assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) case management were on time and mostly thorough in identifying their needs, day-to-day oversight from case managers for those requiring the most support was not robust enough. They took too long to carry out welfare checks prompted by the safety team, and were not always available to react to prisoners' needs promptly. Prisoners on ACCT to whom we spoke reported infrequent interactions with their case managers, and case

reviews were not always conducted by the same staff member, which was unhelpful to prisoners.

- 3.20 We considered that the prison had made insufficient progress in this area.

Time out of cell

Concern: Most prisoners spent almost 22 hours a day locked up, with half of them sharing cramped cells designed for one. This affected prisoner well-being and frustrated attempts to rehabilitate them.

- 3.21 Most prisoners had more time out of their cells now than at the inspection. Higher staffing levels (see paragraph 3.1) meant that education, training and work activities had taken place consistently, and good oversight of the regime and its daily delivery gave leaders a realistic understanding of where further improvement was needed. The offer ranged from 22 to 78 hours out of cell a week, dependent on prisoner engagement with activities and behaviour on a particular day. Few were subject to the lowest unlocked levels. There was some regime slippage during the visit, which reduced the actual time unlocked for some prisoners. Custodial managers needed to take more oversight of evening association periods to make sure they were not cancelled without management authorisation.
- 3.22 All prisoners were allocated to and expected to attend education, work or training activities during the core day (other than those who were retired, undergoing substance misuse stabilisation or unable to work for health reasons). Prison data showed an average of 67% of prisoners attended their scheduled activity and this was gradually increasing. The governor had employed dedicated staff to keep the daily routine going and prisoners were encouraged to go to work or education through incentives such as evening association periods (see paragraph 3.26). There was a more robust response to non-engagement with purposeful activity through daily oversight of non-attendance and follow-up with prisoners (see paragraph 3.25). The governor was personally driving progress towards achieving at least 80% attendance.
- 3.23 Prisoners spent too limited time outside in exercise areas. Leaders were aware of this and had plans to address it.
- 3.24 We considered that the prison had made good progress in this area.

Education, skills and work



This part of the report is written by Ofsted inspectors. Ofsted's thematic approach reflects the monitoring visit methodology used for further education and skills providers. The themes set out the main areas for improvement in the prison's previous inspection report or progress monitoring visit letter.

Theme 1: What progress had leaders and managers made in increasing attendance and allocating sufficient prisoners to education, skills and work?

- 3.25 Since the previous inspection, leaders had taken various appropriate steps to increase attendance. Senior leaders routinely held managers accountable for attendance in purposeful activities. They held daily meetings where data was scrutinised, and valuable insight into the attendance of prisoners from each wing was shared. Where needed, specialist officers were deployed to wings to investigate non-attendance. These changes indicated that attendance to purposeful activities was becoming a key focus across the prison. However, leaders acknowledged that more must be done to ensure attendance rates are routinely high.
- 3.26 Leaders had implemented strategies to incentivise prisoners to attend education, skills and work. Prisoners attending functional skills lessons received additional evening recreation and a financial bonus for attendance. Prisoners with continuous high attendance were rewarded with enhanced privileges, such as more time out of the cell, evening association, enhanced shopping and better jobs. They also attended additional enhanced family days. These actions had led to more prisoners attending education, skills and work sessions.
- 3.27 Leaders had made the allocation process more efficient and streamlined. They had made two significant changes to the allocation process. Initially, they found that the personal risk assessment, a prerequisite for prisoners to attend specific courses, took too long to complete by the allocations team. To resolve this, the activity was allocated to the security team to complete promptly when prisoners arrived at the establishment. The second intervention was to digitalise the data used during the allocation process. This took more time to achieve as staff needed training. Staff now had a clear oversight of the activities available to prisoners and could better support them in making choices. Therefore, most prisoners were allocated to a purposeful activity.

- 3.28 Ofsted considered that the prison had made reasonable progress against this theme.

Theme 2: What progress had leaders and managers made to ensure that prisoners had access to a sufficient range of accredited courses, including in English and mathematics, that would help them gain employment in prison or on release?

- 3.29 Leaders had expanded the curriculums to include more accredited courses. Soon after the previous inspection, leaders sourced additional funding and used this quickly to increase the number of accredited courses available to prisoners. Leaders worked with Weston College, their prison education framework provider, to modify contracts, which enabled curriculum flexibility. This significantly increased the number of places for prisoners to study English and mathematics functional skills qualifications. However, it was too early to see the impact of the actions on the number of prisoners who achieved these qualifications.
- 3.30 Leaders had increased the availability of curriculums to vulnerable prisoners so that they could take part in English and mathematics lessons. They had also designed a range of short, modular taster courses in English and mathematics, which enabled prisoners to achieve certification in the skills they had developed. This matched the needs of prisoners.
- 3.31 Managers conducted a skill needs analysis of prisoners and researched labour market intelligence. This was to ensure that changes to the curriculum offer closely translated prisoners' needs into a better range of pathways. For example, managers introduced popular hospitality and bicycle maintenance courses, which linked well to local opportunities on release. They also promoted employment opportunities with national employers, which motivated prisoners to learn.
- 3.32 Ofsted considered that the prison had made reasonable progress against this theme.

Theme 3: What progress had leaders and managers made to ensure that all prisoners with additional learning needs had the support they needed?

- 3.33 Leaders had made progress towards collating critical information about prisoners' neurodiversity needs. Information was collected in several key areas, including reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders used their findings to create a neurodiversity tracker that provided designated prison staff with essential information about the prisoners under their supervision. Through this process, leaders had started to identify the support needs of the broader prison population. However, leaders recognise that more still needed to be done to ensure that all prisoners with additional learning needs receive the support they require.

- 3.34 Leaders provided staff with effective training to help them recognise the signs of prisoners with neurodiversity needs. They identified a neurodiversity champion on each wing and created a neurodiversity toolkit for staff. The toolkit included helpful information to support staff in taking the correct action so that prisoners received the specialist support needed more quickly. As a result, staff were now better equipped to provide immediate support to prisoners.
- 3.35 The number of prisoners identified as requiring an in-depth screener of their learning support needs had increased. Using the screening results, tutors developed context statements for each prisoner. These statements identified prisoners' additional needs or barriers to learning. The statements provided staff with helpful information that was shared with prisoners and transferred on to the virtual campus. Teachers also used these statements to identify the appropriate teaching strategies for neurodiverse prisoners. Because of this, prisoners understood their own learning needs better.
- 3.36 Ofsted considered that the prison had made reasonable progress against this theme.

Returning to the community

Concern: Work to prepare prisoners for release was poorly coordinated and under-resourced. Prisoners' needs and risks were not reliably identified, reviewed or addressed, and a quarter of prisoners were released homeless.

- 3.37 There was better coordination of pre-release work than at the inspection, and most staff shortfalls were being remedied. There were still some fragilities, including access to accommodation on release, support for prisoners on remand and lack of support for prisoners who needed identification documents or bank accounts. Some of these issues were being addressed with relevant stakeholders.
- 3.38 A reducing reoffending needs analysis completed after the inspection had led to an update of the strategy and the new post of a partnership engagement manager, introduced to support improvement in this area. This manager led monthly pathway meetings, which aided collaborative working between the different agencies supporting prisoners' releases and focused on their delivery of services for each pathway.
- 3.39 The pre-release team now had more staff and increased involvement from their managers. Although not all prisoners had had their release needs assessed, this was improving. However, there had been a recent increase in the numbers of prisoners released, and the impact of prisoners having only a short time left to serve after lengthy remand periods, the end of custody supervised licence (see Glossary) scheme and short-term recalls put these release processes under pressure.
- 3.40 The weekly release board, which was new at the time of the inspection, had continued and was ensuring multidisciplinary oversight of individual

prisoner release plans. In addition, staff from the contracted housing support agency were working with more prisoners than at the time of the inspection and housing support for unsentenced new arrivals was due to begin in July 2024.

- 3.41 We considered that the prison had made reasonable progress in this area.

Section 4 Summary of judgements

A list of the HMI Prisons concerns and Ofsted themes followed up at this visit and the judgements made.

HMI Prisons concerns

Staffing across the prison was insufficient to ensure the delivery of a safe and purposeful regime. Staff shortages, in particular at officer level and in health care, had restricted significantly the daily regime and other outcomes for prisoners.

Good progress

Levels of violence were too high. The strategy to make the prison safer was too narrow and failed to address significant underlying causes. This included the absence of clear boundaries for behaviour, ineffective staff-prisoner engagement, and the impact of such a poor regime.

Good progress

Illicit drugs were readily available to prisoners. Although security measures had improved, not enough had been done to prevent the supply and address the demand for drugs.

Good progress

The number of self-inflicted deaths and the rate of reported self-harm were much too high. The poor regime, ineffective relationships with wing staff and a lack of support – for example, a lack of help to support and rebuild family ties – contributed to a sense of hopelessness and despondency among many prisoners.

Insufficient progress

Most prisoners spent almost 22 hours a day locked up, with half of them sharing cramped cells designed for one. This affected prisoner well-being and frustrated attempts to rehabilitate them.

Good progress

Work to prepare prisoners for release was poorly coordinated and under-resourced. Prisoners' needs and risks were not reliably identified, reviewed or addressed, and a quarter of prisoners were released homeless.

Reasonable progress

Ofsted themes

What progress had leaders and managers made in increasing attendance and allocating sufficient prisoners to education, skills and work?

Reasonable progress

What progress had leaders and managers made to ensure that prisoners had access to a sufficient range of accredited courses, including in English and mathematics, that would help them gain employment in prison or on release?

Reasonable progress

What progress had leaders and managers made to ensure that all prisoners with additional learning needs had the support they needed?

Reasonable progress

Appendix I About this report

HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMI Prisons) is an independent, statutory organisation which reports on the treatment and conditions of those detained in prisons, young offender institutions, secure training centres, immigration detention facilities, court custody and military detention.

All visits carried out by HM Inspectorate of Prisons contribute to the UK's response to its international obligations under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). OPCAT requires that all places of detention are visited regularly by independent bodies – known as the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) – which monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees. HM Inspectorate of Prisons is one of several bodies making up the NPM in the UK.

Independent reviews of progress (IRPs) are designed to improve accountability to ministers about the progress prisons make in addressing HM Inspectorate of Prisons' concerns in between inspections. IRPs take place at the discretion of the Chief Inspector when a full inspection suggests the prison would benefit from additional scrutiny and focus on a limited number of the concerns raised at the inspection. IRPs do not therefore result in assessments against our healthy prison tests. HM Inspectorate of Prisons' healthy prison tests are safety, respect, purposeful activity and rehabilitation and release planning. For more information see our website:

<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/our-expectations/>

The aims of IRPs are to:

- assess progress against selected priority and key concerns
- support improvement
- identify any emerging difficulties or lack of progress at an early stage
- assess the sufficiency of the leadership and management response to our concerns at the full inspection.

This report contains a summary from the Chief Inspector and a brief record of our findings in relation to each concern we have followed up. The reader may find it helpful to refer to the report of the full inspection, carried out in [MONTH, YEAR] for further detail on the original findings (available on our website at <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/>).

IRP methodology

IRPs are announced at least three months in advance and take place eight to 12 months after a full inspection. When we announce an IRP, we identify which concerns we intend to follow up (usually no more than 15). Depending on the concerns to be followed up, IRP visits may be conducted jointly with Ofsted (England), Estyn (Wales), the Care Quality Commission and the General Pharmaceutical Council. This joint work ensures expert knowledge is deployed and avoids multiple inspection visits.

During our three-day visit, we collect a range of evidence about the progress in implementing each selected concern. Sources of evidence include observation, discussions with prisoners, staff and relevant third parties, documentation and data.

Each concern followed up by HMI Prisons during an IRP is given one of four progress judgements:

No meaningful progress

Managers had not yet formulated, resourced or begun to implement a realistic improvement plan to address this concern.

Insufficient progress

Managers had begun to implement a realistic improvement strategy to address this concern but the actions taken since our inspection had not yet resulted in sufficient evidence of progress (for example, better and embedded systems and processes).

Reasonable progress

Managers were implementing a realistic improvement strategy to address this concern and there was evidence of progress (for example, better and embedded systems and processes) and/or early evidence of some improving outcomes for prisoners.

Good progress

Managers had implemented a realistic improvement strategy to address this concern and had delivered a clear improvement in outcomes for prisoners.

When Ofsted attends an IRP its methodology replicates the monitoring visits conducted in further education and skills provision. Each theme followed up by Ofsted is given one of three progress judgements.

Insufficient progress

Progress has been either slow or insubstantial or both, and the demonstrable impact on learners has been negligible.

Reasonable progress

Action taken by the provider is already having a beneficial impact on learners and improvements are sustainable and are based on the provider's thorough quality assurance procedures.

Significant progress

Progress has been rapid and is already having considerable beneficial impact on learners.

Ofsted's approach to undertaking monitoring visits and the inspection methodology involved are set out in the *Further education and skills inspection handbook*, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework>.

Inspection team

This independent review of progress was carried out by:

| | |
|----------------|------------------------|
| Martin Lomas | Deputy chief inspector |
| Angus Jones | Team leader |
| Angela Johnson | Inspector |
| Esra Sari | Inspector |
| Bev Ramsell | Lead Ofsted inspector |
| Judy Foster | Ofsted inspector |
| Robert Mottram | Ofsted inspector |

Appendix II Glossary

We try to make our reports as clear as possible, and this short glossary should help to explain some of the specialist terms you may find. If you need an explanation of any other terms, please see the longer glossary, available on our website at: <http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/about-our-inspections/>

End of custody supervised licence (ECSL)

Introduced in October 2023 to ease overcrowding in jails across England and Wales, it allows certain prisoners to be released up to 70 days before the end of their sentence.

Family days

Many prisons, in addition to normal visits, arrange 'family days' throughout the year. These are usually open to all prisoners who have small children, grandchildren, or other young relatives.

Key worker scheme

The key worker scheme operates across the closed male estate. All prison officers have a caseload of around six prisoners. The aim is to enable staff to develop constructive, motivational relationships with prisoners, which can support and encourage them to work towards positive rehabilitative goals.

Leader

In this report the term 'leader' refers to anyone with leadership or management responsibility in the prison system. We will direct our narrative at the level of leadership which has the most capacity to influence a particular outcome.

Time out of cell

Time out of cell, in addition to formal 'purposeful activity', includes any time prisoners are out of their cells to associate or use communal facilities to take showers or make telephone calls.

Urgent Notification

Where an inspection identifies significant concerns about the treatment and conditions of detainees, the Chief Inspector may issue an Urgent Notification to the Secretary of State within seven calendar days stating the reasons and identifying issues that require improvement. The Secretary of State commits to respond publicly to the concerns raised within 28 calendar days.

Virtual campus

Provides prisoners with internet access to community education, training and employment opportunities.

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