

Report on an independent review of progress at

HMP Swaleside

by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

12-14 August 2024



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Section 1 Chief Inspector's summary

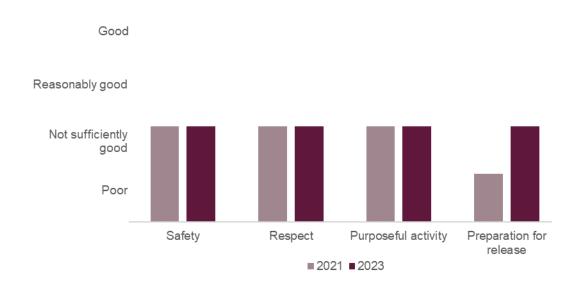
- 1.1 First opened in the 1980s and located on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent, HMP Swaleside is a category B training prison holding 939 adult male prisoners, most serving over four years and a significant proportion serving life sentences.
- 1.2 This review visit followed up on the concerns we raised at our last inspection of HMP Swaleside in 2023.

What we found at our last inspection

1.3 This was our seventh visit since 2016. At our most recent full inspections in 2021 and 2023, we made the following judgements about outcomes for prisoners.

Figure 1: HMP Swaleside healthy prison outcomes in 2021 and 2023

Note: rehabilitation and release planning became 'preparation for release' in October 2023.



- 1.4 Leaders at Swaleside had six months' notice of our inspection in 2023 with the aim of giving them the opportunity to focus on our priority concerns. In addition to this, HMPPS had reduced the population of prisoners held at the prison.
- 1.5 It was therefore disappointing that outcomes in three of our healthy prison tests remained not sufficiently good at the 2023 inspection. The prison was still not safe enough, the rate of violence remained high and there had been seven self-inflicted deaths in two years. There were too few opportunities for work and education and around two fifths of the population were locked up during the working day. Outcomes in the Preparation for Release test had improved slightly but there was too little support from prison offender managers to meet the offending related needs of the largely high-risk population.

What we found during this review visit

- 1.6 At this review visit, progress made against our concerns varied considerably. We found reasonable progress in three areas of concern but insufficient progress in another three. Ofsted found reasonable progress against two of their themes but insufficient progress in the third.
- 1.7 The use of drones to deliver drugs and other illicit items to prisoners had become a major problem during the last year and all evidence showed an increase in drug use by prisoners. The impact of this had clearly limited the degree of progress made in almost all the concerns we reviewed at this visit.
- 1.8 Leaders had developed their response to the demand for drugs by reestablishing a decent range of therapeutic approaches, but waiting times for these were far too long due to the level of need among prisoners. The PIPE unit and the outreach work were good and the support provided by the drug recovery wing had improved.
- 1.9 The rates of self-harm and violence had increased since September 2023 and serious assaults, particularly on staff, were a continuing cause for concern. It was good that officer recruitment had been effective but half had less than a year in service and many lacked the confidence and skill to manage prisoners' behaviour robustly while providing them with decent care. However, leaders had put in place good support for officers which, over time, may bring some much-needed improvements.
- 1.10 Reasonable progress had been made in recruiting staff to education, skills and work and the number of spaces available to prisoners had increased, although attendance was still not good enough. Gradual and determined progress had been made in increasing the number of probation officers in the OMU but caseloads remained high and contact levels had not yet improved. Too many prisoners found it difficult to progress as population pressures prevented them from transferring to a category C prison. No specific offending behaviour programme was being delivered to men convicted of sexual offences, so they also struggled to demonstrate progression.
- 1.11 Leadership of the prison had changed substantially in the last few months and was now fragile as the governor and deputy were both in post temporarily and were relatively new to these significant leadership roles. Despite this, they had taken our concerns seriously and had made a realistic assessment of the progress made to date and the barriers to improving outcomes for prisoners. Clearly drug availability and drug use were undermining their efforts to progress and the associated negative consequences for outcomes in safety, stability and well-being were now acute. HMPPS needs to take robust measures to stop the influx of drugs if leaders at Swaleside are to stand a chance of making good progress.

Charlie Taylor

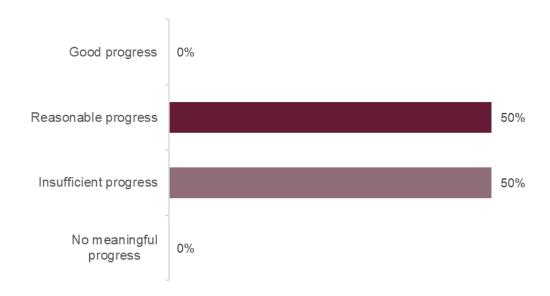
HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, August 2024

Section 2 Key findings

- 2.1 At this IRP visit, we followed up on progress made against six concerns from our most recent inspection in September 2023 and Ofsted followed up three themes.
- 2.2 HMI Prisons judged that there was reasonable progress in three concerns and insufficient progress in three concerns.

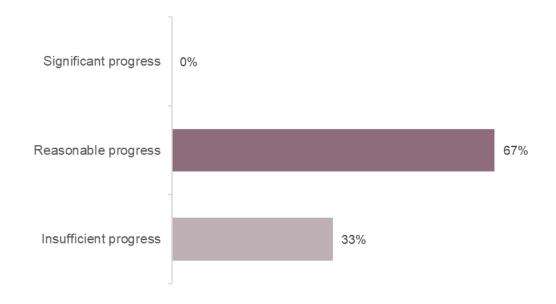
Figure 2: Progress on HMI Prisons concerns from 2023 inspection (n=6)

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 two themes and insufficient progress in one theme.

Figure 3: Progress on Ofsted themes from 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 IRP visit which other prisons may be able to learn from or replicate.

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.

Suicide and self-harm prevention

Concern: Fourteen prisoners had died at Swaleside in the previous two years, including seven whose deaths were self-inflicted. Ongoing weaknesses included inconsistent support for prisoners at risk, a failure by some night staff to carry anti-ligature knives, slow responses to cell bells and inadequate reviews of Coroners' and PPO recommendations.

- 3.1 The recorded rate of self-harm and the number of individuals involved had increased over the last 11 months and one very recent death in June 2024 was suspected to have been suicide.
- 3.2 Data were analysed and used well to understand the causes of self-harm. Positively, the size of the safety team had increased with six officers now available to support prisoners. However, the care for men in crisis was undermined by a variety of problems such as prisoners' frustration with very basic aspects of daily life, the rate of violence (see paragraph 3.9) and the easy availability of illicit drugs (see paragraph 3.14). In addition, during the previous month, about 200 prisoners had been unemployed and lacked purposeful activity to keep them occupied and help them cope.
- 3.3 There were very early signs of progress in developing the range of support, including plans for a serenity garden, but funding for this had yet to be secured. Since the last inspection, the use of constant supervision had increased but the condition of the cell on G wing was poor and unsuitable for anybody in crisis. The bed was damaged, the floor covering was torn, there was graffiti on the walls and the toilet was very dirty.
- 3.4 There was compelling evidence that staff did not always complete the required checks on prisoners at risk of suicide and self-harm and we were not confident that records we examined were accurate. Some of the care plans in the ACCT documentation (assessment, care in custody and teamwork case management of prisoners at risk of suicide or self-harm) were months out of date and did not reflect the prisoners' current needs. None of the plans focused on getting men into activity and sometimes the support was repeatedly stopped and restarted without addressing the underlying issues.
- The focus on implementing and reviewing recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) had improved but not all actions were embedded in practice. For instance, cell observation

- panels were still routinely blocked by prisoners so that staff could not check on the welfare of the occupant.
- The cell bell monitoring system had been repaired and leaders could now check for delays in responses, which was an improvement. However, we observed some slow responses and records showed that on average nearly 20% took far too long which was a risk to prisoners' safety.
- 3.7 Anti-ligature knives were now readily available for night staff to collect before their shift, which was an improvement, and self-harm emergency response kits were also available on each wing.
- 3.8 Insufficient progress had been made in this area.

Encouraging positive behaviour

Concern: Levels of violence remained high and investigations into violent incidents were often delayed and of poor quality.

- 3.9 It was concerning that the high rates of violence had increased further since the full inspection and around a fifth of incidents were serious in nature. The rate of serious assaults against staff was the highest of the comparator group. Many incidents involved multiple perpetrators and weapons and some had resulted in acute injuries.
- 3.10 Leaders were committed to understanding and addressing the causes of violence and recognised that these were intrinsically linked to organised criminal activity that was responsible for the ready availability of drugs and other illicit items. They had taken learning about gangs from other prisons and were using this to manage the population and reduce opportunities for conflict.
- 3.11 Safer custody officers completed an initial screening of challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP, see Glossary) referrals but, despite considerable effort to upskill staff, there were still delays in completing investigations which were not always of a good enough quality. Case management also varied in quality. However, some analysis of recent cases had shown that most prisoners managed through a CSIP had not been involved in perpetrating acts of violence since their plan had been closed which was good to see.
- 3.12 We were encouraged by prisoners who told us they could avoid getting into violent incidents if they chose and it was positive that some had successfully addressed their poor behaviour. They felt well supported by staff and other departments such as the PIPE outreach service (psychologically informed planned environment) or the substance misuse team which had helped them improve their behaviour.
- 3.13 Insufficient progress had been made in this area.

Security

Concern: Drugs were too easy to obtain and measures to reduce supply were not comprehensive or effective.

- 3.14 Illicit drugs were now even more readily available than they had been during our full inspection. This was demonstrated by the higher positive drug testing rate. The average rate was around 32% over the last year but in June 2024 it had peaked at over 56%.
- 3.15 There had been a substantial change in the way drugs and other illicit items were being supplied and sophisticated drones were now used to deliver packages. This was undermining safety and stability in the prison and the use of drugs underpinned the lack of progress in many of the concerns set out in this report.
- 3.16 Leaders were working closely with the police and other agencies to tackle the problem which had resulted in some arrests. However, without significant investment and support from HMPPS, tackling the use of drones would remain an impossible task.
- 3.17 Staff corruption continued to be taken seriously and several staff were suspended at the time of our visit on suspicion of bringing illicit items into the prison. Enhanced security procedures on entry to the prison were now more embedded and applied consistently.
- 3.18 While trying to reduce the supply of drugs, leaders were also working hard to reduce demand among the population. There was very good cohesive working among security, safety, health and substance misuse partners who met regularly to share information. Prisoners found under the influence were automatically referred to substance misuse services. Following an improvement notice issued in December 2023, the drug recovery wing was now much better and the incentivised substance-free living unit also provided an opportunity for prisoners to abstain from illicit drug use.
- 3.19 Insufficient progress had been made in this area.

Staff prisoner relationships

Concern: Many staff lacked confidence and assertiveness in their management of prisoners. Supervising officers did not provide sufficient visible support on many wings.

3.20 It was impressive that the acute shortage of officers which we noted in our last report had now been addressed through proactive recruitment. However, at the time of this visit, just over half the officer group had less than a year in service and this would increase over the next two months as newly trained officers were due to take up post. This level of

- inexperience inevitably led to a continuing lack of confidence and assertiveness in the management of prisoners.
- 3.21 Leaders had, however, made good progress in providing support to new recruits. For example, the locally resourced coaching team supported them in their day-to-day roles and all new officers were assigned a mentor. New staff told us they found the additional support helpful. Staff also benefited from training sessions every two months to upskill them in a range of areas such as CSIP and ACCT processes.
- 3.22 Supervising officers and other leaders and managers were more visible than at the last inspection, both on wings at key times such as the serving of meals and at other times, including movements to activities.
- 3.23 Reasonable progress had been made in this area.

Health and social care

Concern: Prisoners did not have access to an adequate range of psychological therapeutic interventions and waiting times for those that were available were too long.

- 3.24 Progress had been made since our inspection and an appropriate range of psychological therapeutic interventions was now available. However, the use of illicit drugs by prisoners was adversely affecting their mental health and well-being and increased the severity of need among the population.
- 3.25 There had been successful recruitment to all but one of the vacant psychology posts in the integrated mental health service team (IMHS). However, a chronic nursing shortage prevented the team from delivering enough interventions, although demand remained high at around 200 referrals each month.
- 3.26 The assessment of need was now more robust and more patients were being identified which in turn led to longer waiting times. Since our inspection, the number of patients waiting for therapeutic interventions had increased from 124 to 184. Waiting times for low intensity one-to-one interventions was around 38 weeks while the waiting time for counselling was 99 weeks and for high intensity interventions 58 weeks, all of which were too long.
- 3.27 Psychology staff supported essential core duties such as attending ACCT reviews and conducting welfare checks for all patients on the waiting lists. However, this reduced the time they had to deliver interventions and this was exacerbated by a lack of appropriate rooms around the prison to see patients.
- 3.28 A wide range of interventions was delivered by Change, Grow, Live (CGL), the psychosocial substance misuse service, and an impressive number of interventions delivered in the PIPE unit, including an outreach service, complemented the work of the IMHS.

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 improving attendance rates at education, skills and work and in ensuring prisoners developed positive attitudes towards education and work?

- 3.30 Prisoners had very different attitudes towards activities depending on what staff had allocated them to do. Leaders had found effective ways of encouraging prisoners to take part in education, for example through teaching English in a classroom in the gym during prisoners' gym sessions. Most prisoners recognised the need to improve their English skills to help progress both within the prison and on release. Prisoners who took part in education had positive attitudes towards their studies and most prisoners completed their courses. However, prisoners were frustrated by the lack of work roles available that would help them on release. For example, prisoners who were in separate groups due to the nature of their offences only had access to one workshop and a small number of education sessions. As result, their progress was hindered, and they had poor attitudes towards work. The negative attitudes of prisoners were made worse by long waiting lists for courses. Prisoners made slow progress due to officers taking them late to activities.
- 3.31 Since the previous inspection, some 11 months ago, leaders and managers had put in place a range of strategies to help improve prisoners' attendance at work and education. For example, they had introduced a learner engagement specialist and a programme manager to encourage prisoners to attend their lessons. They had reduced the number of prisoners who remained on the wings when activities were running. Leaders and managers had increased the offer of education, for example to include barista training and GCSE English, which prisoners recognised were meaningful. Through using these strategies, leaders had gradually improved the attendance rates at work and particularly at education since the previous inspection. However, overall, the rates remained too low for a training prison. Attendance at induction remained poor. During our visit attendance across all areas was too low.

3.32 Ofsted considered that the prison had made insufficient progress against this theme.

Theme 2: What progress had leaders and managers made in ensuring prisoners took part in work and activities by making sure there were suitable teachers and instructors to run a successful daily regime?

- 3.33 Leaders and managers had successfully filled nearly all of the staff vacancies in education and most of the instructor vacancies. Leaders and managers had thought creatively about how they could open more activity spaces where they struggled to find suitable staff. For example, where they found it difficult to recruit multiple engineering instructors, they recruited other staff to offer other useful activities such as additional reading and literacy support. As a result, they offered alternative activities that still benefitted prisoners.
- 3.34 Leaders and managers had enabled more prisoners to study qualifications in work areas. They had trained instructors, for example in woodwork to teach qualifications. Leaders offered outreach provision for English and mathematics to prisoners who could not attend lessons, due to being unable to mix with other prisoners, which provided more prisoners with the opportunity to study.
- 3.35 Leaders and managers had increased the number of activity spaces available to have enough for nearly all prisoners to take part in activities. However, waiting lists for education courses such as construction and English were too long. In addition, leaders and managers had not made sure that staff had filled the available spaces in these areas effectively.
- 3.36 Leaders had not yet put in place plans for suitable staff to make sure prisoners were returned to their activities after appointments in the employment hub. As a result, too many prisoners were reluctant to attend and did not take up opportunities to receive support to help them make progress in the prison and on release.
- 3.37 Ofsted considered that the prison had made reasonable progress against this theme.

Theme 3: What progress had leaders and managers made to ensure that prisoners received effective career information, advice and guidance and high-quality plans to develop the skills they needed for successful progression and that new arrivals were allocated quickly to education, skills or work?

3.38 Leaders had made sure that most prisoners were allocated to work or education reasonably promptly. They provided training, for example in industrial cleaning, to prepare prisoners for work roles quickly. However, in too many instances the work roles prisoners were assigned to were not linked to their career aspirations.

- 3.39 Leaders had made sure that information, advice and guidance (IAG) staff worked with most prisoners to complete a personal learning plan. Staff set most prisoners realistic goals. However, records of discussions lacked detail and did not contain plans for the duration of prisoners' time in the prison. Very few prisoners could remember their goals. Too many did not know what their next steps were or when they would start.
- A small group of prisoners who had been in the prison for a long time did not have suitable plans. IAG staff struggled to allocate these prisoners to suitable ambitious activity that would help them on release. As a result, too many of these prisoners did not make progress or gain useful knowledge and skills.
- 3.41 Where IAG staff had developed suitable plans with prisoners, they had skilfully shared examples of English and mathematics skills prisoners would use in different work areas. Staff made it clear to prisoners they would need to improve their maths and English to make progress. As a result, prisoners were keen to complete these qualifications.
- 3.42 Despite being a training prison rather than a resettlement prison, leaders and managers had resourced useful resettlement support for prisoners through IAG staff. This had been beneficial to the prisoners being released directly from the prison. A high proportion of these had received support to create a CV and were well prepared for work.
- 3.43 Ofsted considered that the prison had made reasonable progress against this theme.

Preparation for release

Concern: There were few progression opportunities, and many category C prisoners were unable to transfer to a more suitable prison because of national population pressures. There was inadequate one-to-one work to mitigate these systemic problems.

- 3.44 There had been gradual and determined progress in securing more probation officers for the offender management unit (OMU). This included the use of trainees which was a creative response to the continuing shortage. Despite this, there were still not enough probation officers for the size of the population while the new recruits could not yet carry full caseloads. The caseloads held by the experienced probation officers were still high and the level of contact with prisoners had not yet improved.
- 3.45 Collaboration between the programmes team and the forensic psychology department was good and a range of accredited and validated interventions remained in place. Delivery was projected to increase in the current financial year, enabling more prisoners to progress.

- 3.46 The PIPE unit and its outreach service continued to offer very good support to about 100 men with the most complex needs.
- 3.47 Population pressures still made it difficult to move category C men to another prison where they could access the right progression opportunities. About 120 category C prisoners remained at Swaleside, the same number as at our last inspection. In addition, too many prisoners convicted of sexual offences did not have access to the specific offending behaviour interventions they needed and securing a transfer for them remained difficult.
- 3.48 Reasonable progress had been made 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

Fourteen prisoners had died at Swaleside in the previous two years, including seven whose deaths were self-inflicted. Ongoing weaknesses included inconsistent support for prisoners at risk, a failure by some night staff to carry anti-ligature knives, slow responses to cell bells and inadequate reviews of Coroners' and PPO recommendations.

Insufficient progress

Levels of violence remained high and investigations into violent incidents were often delayed and of poor quality.

Insufficient progress

Drugs were too easy to obtain and measures to reduce supply were not comprehensive or effective.

Insufficient progress

Many staff lacked confidence and assertiveness in their management of prisoners. Supervising officers did not provide sufficient visible support on many wings.

Reasonable progress

Prisoners did not have access to an adequate range of psychological therapeutic interventions and waiting times for those that were available were too long.

Reasonable progress

There were few progression opportunities, and many category C prisoners were unable to transfer to a more suitable prison because of national population pressures. There was inadequate one-to-one work to mitigate these systemic problems.

Reasonable progress

Ofsted themes

What progress had leaders and managers made in improving attendance rates at education, skills and work and in ensuring prisoners developed positive attitudes towards education and work?

Insufficient progress

What progress had leaders and managers made in ensuring prisoners took part in work and activities by making sure there were suitable teachers and instructors to run a successful daily regime?

Reasonable progress

What progress had leaders and managers made to ensure that prisoners received effective careers information, advice and guidance and high-quality plans to develop the skills they needed for successful progression, and that new arrivals were allocated quickly to education, skills or work?

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 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:

Charlie Taylor Chief Inspector
Sandra Fieldhouse Team leader
Kellie Reeve Inspector
Jonathan Tickner Inspector

Tania Osborne Health and social care inspector
Simon Newman Health and social care inspector
Lynda Day Care Quality Commission inspector

Rebecca Jennings Ofsted inspector Sharon McDermott 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/

Certified normal accommodation (CNA) and operational capacity

Baseline CNA is the sum total of all certified accommodation in an establishment except cells in segregation units, health care cells or rooms that are not routinely used to accommodate long stay patients. In-use CNA is baseline CNA less those places not available for immediate use, such as damaged cells, cells affected by building works, and cells taken out of use due to staff shortages. Operational capacity is the total number of prisoners that an establishment can hold without serious risk to good order, security and the proper running of the planned regime.

Challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP)

Used by all adult prisons to manage those prisoners who are violent or pose a heightened risk of being violent. These prisoners are managed and supported on a plan with individualised targets and regular reviews. Not everyone who is violent is case managed on CSIP. Some prisons also use the CSIP framework to support victims of violence.

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.

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