

HMP Elmley

Prison education standalone progress monitoring visit report

Name of lead inspector: Saul Pope, Her Majesty's Inspector

Visit dates: 22 and 23 June 2021

Address:

Church Road
Eastchurch
Sheerness
Kent
ME12 4DZ

Progress monitoring visit

Ofsted context and focus of visit

On 17 March 2020, all Ofsted routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of our phased return to routine inspections of education, skills and work activities in prisons and Young Offender Institutions (YOIs), Ofsted is carrying out progress monitoring visits. The visit was conducted by Ofsted alone without HMI Prisons. The visit was conducted on site. At the time of the visit, the establishment was at stage 3 of Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Services' (HMPPS) recovery roadmap and had been at that stage for six weeks.

Progress monitoring visits aim to inform prisoners, employers and government on how establishments are meeting the education and skills needs of all prisoners during this period and how leaders are planning to reinstate a full education, skills and work curriculum. The focus of these visits is on the theme set out below. A progress judgement is made against the theme. That progress judgement will be one of the following: insufficient, reasonable or significant progress.

What progress are leaders making towards ensuring that staff teach a full curriculum and provide support to meet prisoners' needs, including the provision of remote learning?

Insufficient progress

Leaders have not ensured that the curriculum fully meets the needs of prisoners. Too few prisoners access in-cell study, such as work packs on vocational topics, mathematics or English. There are too few face-to-face activity places, particularly in the education provision. Leaders, including regional leaders, have taken an overly cautious approach to the number of prisoners they allow to join face-to-face classes. Too many prisoners are on courses that are not challenging enough. Leaders have focused too closely on prisoner interest in a topic, rather than need, when allocating prisoners to courses.

Prison leaders have not ensured that all prisoners can benefit equally from education activities. Vulnerable prisoners and foreign national prisoners can only attend classes in a narrow range of subjects. Prisoners in some work activities benefit from outreach mathematics and English classes, whereas those in neighbouring workshops do not. This has prevented prisoners from catching up on missed learning time.

Leaders, managers and residential unit staff do not place a high enough priority on ensuring that prisoners arrive at education classes on time or attend classes frequently enough. As a result, prisoners enrolled on face-to-face classes arrive late, or too often refuse to attend. Prisoners attend at higher rates in workshops. They work diligently in teams to complete tasks, for example, in the laundry or industrial

cleaning. However, too many prisoners with wing-based roles do not work with the same diligence.

Too few prisoners have completed an induction. Prisoners who complete their induction do not benefit from useful information, advice and guidance (IAG) to fully understand their options for education, skills and work. In too many cases, those who complete mathematics and English initial assessments at induction do not find out the results of their assessments. Prisoners rightly express frustration at the delays in joining education, skills or work activities that result from a slow and poor-quality induction process.

Too few prisoners have benefitted from useful IAG during their sentences. A high proportion have not completed action plans, which staff can use to offer relevant support. Although staff who are responsible for IAG are working to reduce the backlog, they have not made sufficient efforts to provide advice and guidance remotely, for example, through the use of the prison's in-cell telephony system. Leaders have not prioritised access to IAG services for prisoners who are close to the end of their sentences.

During face-to-face lessons, teachers explain concepts carefully to help prisoners develop their understanding. The small number of prisoners who attend vocational classes use their new skills well to produce work that is of a high standard. Prisoners who undertake in-cell work mostly benefit from well-designed work packs. In a small number of cases, level 2 work packs do not provide prisoners with enough challenging activities.

In too many cases, teachers do not use information such as the results of diagnostic assessments or skills scans to plan lessons. Although teachers provide learners with useful written feedback on their work, this does not always have the necessary impact. Too many prisoners do not make use of teachers' comments and suggestions to make improvements to written tasks. In other cases, teachers provide prisoners with the correct answers where they have made mistakes, rather than revisiting topics to help prisoners make corrections themselves.

Leaders and managers do not have a thorough understanding of the support needs of prisoners. Prisoners with learning difficulties do not benefit from in-depth specialist screening to provide a thorough understanding of their needs, or plans to help teachers and instructors offer support during their work and education activities.

Leaders have accurately identified groups of prisoners who have historically not engaged well with education activities. They have been successful in encouraging a far greater proportion of learners from ethnic minority backgrounds to enrol on face-to-face classes. Leaders rightly recognise that they need to do more to support other groups to engage more, such as those from a Traveller background.

Leaders have developed ambitious and realistic plans for the next stage of the recovery roadmap. They plan to introduce far more face-to-face activities. Leaders

also rightly recognise that they need to develop better links with employers to support prisoners who are close to release. They have similarly ambitious plans for greater employer engagement.

Recommendations

- Leaders should ensure that a larger proportion of prisoners can access meaningful education, skills and work activities.
- Leaders should ensure that prisoners receive thorough IAG which helps them to develop their future work, education and career plans.
- Leaders should ensure that prisoners arrive punctually to all education, skills and work activities, and attend planned education classes.
- Leaders and managers should identify all prisoners who need support for learning difficulties, ensuring they benefit from an in-depth screening of their needs and useful support from staff.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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