

RE-INSPECTION MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: HMP Chelmsford

Date of visit: 23 April 2008

Context

The monitoring visit follows the inspection in July 2007 at which inspectors judged the prison's learning and skills to be inadequate for effectiveness of the provision, the overall quality of the provision and leadership and management. The prison's capacity to improve was graded satisfactory, as were achievements and standards and equality of opportunity.

HMP Chelmsford is a male category B local and young offender prison, based in the centre of Chelmsford, Essex. The prison has an operational capacity of 695 prisoners comprising young offenders, vulnerable, remand, unsentenced, short sentenced adults and those serving a life sentence. In March 2008, the prison's population was 696 of whom 441 were adults and 255 were young offenders. Almost 18% of the prison's population are foreign national prisoners. Between 30% and 40% of prisoners stay at the prison for less than four weeks. The Offender Learning and Skills contractor is Milton Keynes College.

Achievement and standards

In Employability Training, the previous report states that, 'Across the prison, too few learners gain accreditation'. What has been done to increase this and how effective has this been?	Reasonable progress
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The prison has taken a number of actions which have broadly been effective. A curriculum review has taken place resulting in some changes to the course offer. Offenders are now able to take a number of qualifications that were not available at the time of the previous inspection. Offenders taking bricklaying, plumbing and electrical installation programmes now all take a qualification in addition to the construction safety certificate. The prison now also offers a wider range of programmes in IT and a teaching qualification. Accreditation in industrial cleaning has been extended to Level 2 as well as Level 1. Overall the numbers of learners gaining qualifications has increased. However, in PICTA (Prison ICT Academy) the number has decreased due to frequent closures for prison operational reasons. No accredited training is yet available in the kitchen, the laundry, recycling, or the library despite there being suitably qualified people in these areas.

In Literacy, numeracy and ESOL the report states that, 'Many learners' progress is slow, especially those working below Level 1'. Is the prison monitoring this and has this now improved?	Significant progress
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Milton Keynes College has developed effective systems to monitor the progress of these learners and there is clear evidence that most of these offenders now make good progress. Short term target-setting has been improved identifying the goals that learners should achieve within a two week period. These are realistic and most learners are achieving these well.

Processes to record and monitor achievement of non-accredited outcomes such as improved confidence have been recently introduced and there is some early evidence that learners are achieving these within an appropriate timescale.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

The report gives 'Poor implementation of quality improvement processes' as a key area for improvement and comments on recent improvements. Has this momentum been maintained? What evidence is there of continued improvement?	Reasonable progress
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The prison's quality improvement processes are more widely implemented across the prison than at the previous inspection. Training in the gym, in the IT workshop and Learndirect and the provision delivered by subcontractors other than Milton Keynes College is appropriately monitored through regular observation of teaching and learning, learner questionnaires, and informal conversations with learners. There is evidence of where these processes have led to improvements in how these programmes are taught. However, there are no processes for the prison to assess the quality of the provision provided by Milton Keynes College.

The college has its own systems to monitor the quality of lessons and provides the head of learning and skills with a lesson observation grade profile at the regular contract meetings. However there is no process by which the head of learning and skills is able to be assured of the robustness of these processes. Similarly the head of learning and skills has a copy of the Milton Keynes College quality manual but no processes are in place for her to judge the effectiveness of its implementation. The prison has produced an appropriate post inspection action plan with clear milestones, all which have been met. Progress is discussed regularly with all key partners including senior managers within the prison. The self-assessment process is appropriate.

Leadership and Management

The previous inspection report gives a key Afl of, 'Inadequate use of data to improve learner outcomes'. What has the prison done to improve this? What data is now available and how is it being used?	Significant progress
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An increased amount of data is now available and is suitably analysed. This is used to inform contract and SMT meetings and actions agreed to improve learner outcomes. Since the previous inspection processes have started to be used to record non-accredited achievements at both an individual and a group level. This information is beginning to be used effectively by the college and there is some early evidence of improving outcomes.

The report states that access to the library is poorly managed and inadequate for some prisoners and that some learners are left in their cells although expecting to attend an activity. What were the reasons for this and what has the prison done to address this?	No discernible progress
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Workshops and the library are frequently closed mostly due to prison officers being redeployed to other duties and little has been done to improve the situation since the previous inspection. The number of hours that workshops and the library have been closed for prison operational reasons is still high. During the eight months before this visit 43% of library time had been lost because no prison officer was available. There is some evidence of an increased level of book loss as a result. Similarly the PICTA IT workshop lost 34% of the time because the prison officer was redeployed to other areas within the prison. Closures for these and other reasons is better monitored and is regularly reported to the prison's senior management team. In addition, between August 2007 and March 2008 Milton Keynes College cancelled 1,252 hours of the 15,012 ordered, primarily due to college staff shortages.