



EVERY year, hundreds of young males serve sentences in St Patrick's. Security Correspondent Ann Murphy visited the Dublin institution.

Families make sad pilgrimage to visit facility

TAXIS and buses trundle along Dublin's North Circular Road, as pedestrians go about their daily business.

Only the constant stream of people walking past in uniform navy trousers gives a clue that there is a detention facility nearby. On closer inspection, there is an almost-hidden signpost reading "St Patrick's, North Circular Road", pointing to a cul-de-sac off the road.

Most of those walking past do not know the Mountjoy prison complex, complete with St Patrick's Institution for young offenders, is just metres away.

However, for some families, the visit to loved ones here is a regular occurrence. The short cul-de-sac leading into St Patrick's is often travelled by mums, dads and siblings of young offenders from all over the country.

The little roadway is lined with foliage and flowers. A line of houses is on one side and clothes fly freely from lines in the summer sun while, just metres away, the freedom of young men from all over the country has been deprived — albeit temporarily.

I follow some families towards the building and press the bell.

Asteel door slides past to allow me in. Inside a screened office are two prison officers who guide me through airport-style security. Despite taking off my jewellery, the metal detector is not happy and a prison officer informs me my shoes are the culprits.

It is just before 2pm and behind me, a small line of prison officers are going through the same procedure as they return from lunch. These security measures are aimed at preventing the smuggling of contraband such as mobile phones or drugs.

Beyond the entrance are busy workshops, classrooms and gyms where young offenders spend their days. In one workshop, an inmate is busy making a pillow for his girlfriend. Alongside him on the table is a copy of Paul Williams' *The Untouchables*, adding a touch of irony.

Children still kept at St Patrick's



Sean Quigley, Governor of St Patrick's Institution for young offenders, says that the detention of under 18s at the institution is a far from ideal situation. Picture: Maura Hickey

criticised by national and international bodies."

The facility's governor, Sean Quigley, agrees that the detention of under 18s in St Patrick's is far from ideal. The development of the new facility in Lusk is the responsibility of the Irish Youth Justice Service, meaning that the detention of under 18s will be taken out of the Irish Prison Service's remit once the building is complete.

Governor Quigley said a special section was developed in St Patrick's for under 18s after the Children Act 2001 obliged the institution to accommodate such offenders. He added: "We in St Patrick's are only interim caretakers for this age group."

The age group of those in the

institution makes education a primary objective in St Patrick's.

Principal Tom Duffy oversees the education programme in the institution.

Governor Quigley said the focus on education was important, given that literacy and numeracy can be an issue for some of those in the institution.

He said: "Some would have had bad experiences in school so we try to get them involved in something else like drama or art."

The emphasis on art can be seen in many areas of the new section of the institution, with large artworks by detainees hanging in the family rooms,

where offenders can meet with their families, away from the main screened visiting area.

Governor Quigley said a positive experience in art and drama classes could prompt detainees to take part in other more formal classes while in the facility.

Some do a Junior Certificate course while serving their sentence. Others do courses which have FETAC accreditation, allowing inmates to continue the module after leaving St Patrick's.

For those not wishing to take part in education classes, there are options such as the gymnasium or taking part in workshops including catering and home economics, carpentry



Metal work class at St Patrick's Institution. It is policy in St Patrick's to help detainees with their education.

and metal work.

In the carpentry workshops, inmates produce hobby horses, nesting boxes for birds and bats, and dolls' houses. The nesting boxes for bats are to be used by Dublin City Council to encourage the nesting of bats in areas of the capital.

In the metalwork area, inmates produce holders for potted plants in the shape of penny farthing bikes.

There is little opportunity to forget they are separated from the outside community though — they also help in making and painting gates for use in the institution.

Such activities are aimed at equipping detainees with a skill for life after St Patrick's.

The average sentence served by inmates is short — between three and six months.

The Children Act 2001 abolished the old sentencing regime, under which the minimum sentence for juveniles was two years.

As with any detention facility, drugs are an issue which staff are constantly fighting. The introduction of airport-style security and screened visiting (preventing contact between visitor and detainee) in St Patrick's helps prevent the smuggling of drugs by visitors.

However, staff admit that attempts are made to smuggle in drugs by people who throw them in over the back wall of

the prison into the exercise yard.

But Governor Quigley said the majority of drugs are seized before it reaches detainees.

It is recognised that the young offenders could have addiction problems and addiction services are available to them.

There is a drug-free area in the institution targeted at helping those wishing to avoid whatever drugs make it into the institution. Regular testing is done in this area to ensure the inmates in it are meeting the drug-free requirement.

Governor Quigley said heroin and other opiates are not the drugs of choice in St Patrick's. Instead, tablets and cannabis are the favoured

drugs. The presence of drugs in any detention community helps contribute to tensions among the population.

Governor Quigley said the level of violence in St Patrick's is low but that some offenders request protection from others because of drug debts or problems with individuals from different criminal groupings.

Given their age, it is to be expected that many offenders will feel out of their depth when they reach St Patrick's. For many, it is their first taste of detention.

As a result, a range of welfare staff — including psychologists and chaplains — are employed in the facility to provide assistance.

Critics noted level of violence

CRITICS of St Patrick's Institution highlight a report by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) which declared the facility to be unsafe for staff and detainees.

The 2006 report singled out St Patrick's Institution, and Mountjoy and Limerick prisons as being unsafe when referring to inter-prisoner intimidation and violence.

The report said: "The extent of the inter-prisoner violence in these prisons is worrying."

The report added: "The CPT's delegation noted the widespread availability of drugs within the establishment and the consequences it engendered in terms of bullying and inter-prisoner violence, and it met numerous prisoners who were the victims of such violence. For example, it met one young inmate who had been assaulted and kicked in the head, and another who had had his jaw broken when attacked by two inmates wielding a sock filled with batteries."

The detention of under 18s in St Patrick's came under fire in the Irish Prison Chaplains' annual report, published in November 2007.

The report said: "We are talking about children and adolescents being subjected to practically the same regime, the same hostile environment as adults."

But the report acknowledged efforts by management to improve conditions in St Patrick's — through education and healthcare. And the report on conditions at the institution by the St Patrick's visiting committee for 2007 also praised the attitude of staff to the welfare of inmates.

Other areas which were praised included the kitchen, the four gyms, the workshops and the school. Such praise followed scathing criticism of the institution by the then Inspector of Prisons, Mr Justice Dermot Kinlen, in his 2004/5 report.

Menu

The menu available to detainees at St Patrick's institution includes:

Monday

Dinner:
● Bacon Chop, parsley sauce, cabbage and creamed potatoes.
Dessert:
● Fruit yoghurt
Tea:
● Steak and Kidney Pie and peas

Thursday

Dinner:
● Homemade beef burgers, pepper sauce, turnip and carrot, roast potatoes
Dessert:
● Fresh fruit
Tea:
● Freshly made vegetable soup and cheese roll.

Sunday

Dinner:
● Pork loin chop, gravy, carrots, parsnip and roast potatoes.
Dessert:
● Trifle
Tea:
● Cheese salad and fresh baked potato.

A sample menu from three days showing the food served to detainees at St Patrick's.

Detention facility now in use for more than 151 years

ST Patrick's Institution for young offenders is located on the Mountjoy prison campus, off Dublin's North Circular Road.

The building was opened in 1858 as a female transportation prison.

In 1956, the borstal in Clonmel was transferred to the building and it was then named St Patrick's.

The capacity in the institu-

tion is 217, with single cell accommodation. However, there is a need on some occasions to double up some accommodation.

When the *Evening Echo* visited on July 15, there were 225 in the facility.

The governor is Seán Quigley.

St Patrick's is mainly for offenders aged 18-21 years, although young offenders aged 16-18 are currently held there

until a new detention facility is developed by the Irish Youth Justice Service in north county Dublin.


The younger section are housed in the B division, where there is capacity for 44 offenders. All 16-year-old offenders are housed here, along with some of the 17-year-olds.

If there are more 17-year-olds than the capacity

in the B division, they are held in the drug-free unit.

There are 52 inmates on protection in the facility, including sex offenders, and for some inmates concerned that involvement in crime gangs on the outside could lead to difficulties for them on the inside. And in other cases, tensions have arisen between inmates for various reasons, including drug debts.

Tomorrow: Ann Murphy looks at the future of child detention.



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