

REPORT ON INSPECTION OF FORT MITCHEL PRISON
COMMENCING THE 15th SEPTEMBER 2003 TO 19th SEPTEMBER 2003

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On the 15th September 2003 to the 19th September 2003 an inspection of Fort Mitchel Prison was carried out by the Inspectorate Team which consisted of:

Mr. Justice Dermot Kinlen	Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention
James Woods	Special Advisor to the Inspector
Martin McCarthy	Prisons Inspectorate
Prof Paul McCutcheon	Consultant
Dr. Patrick Malone	Consultant

- 1.2 The purpose of inspection is to identify issues and take note of any areas of concern or good practice which may pertain.

Date: Mr. Justice Dermot Kinlen
Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Spike Island is situated near the entrance to Cork Harbour approx three quarters of a mile from Cobh and a quarter mile approx from Haulbowline. In the 7th Century a religious community established itself on the island and from then until the 12th Century various invaders such as the Vikings and Normans invaded it and gained possession of it. Over the next few centuries ownership of the island rotated between various groups of people and religious institutions.

It became a place of imprisonment for some time in the 17th Century holding mostly women and children who were families of exiled Irish troops and they were transported as slaves to the West Indies.

2.2 During the 17th Century and 18th Century the island was fortified. An army barracks was built with large accommodation for the army personnel and the fort was secured with guns. It became the Headquarters of the South Irish Coast Defenders. However, in 1847 it became a prison and held those awaiting transportation to Van Diemens land. It held up to 2,200 prisoners at one stage and they were mainly occupied at working on the fortification of the island and the digging out of the moat surrounding the buildings. Prisoner workforce was also used in the construction of Haulbowline dockyard and a wooden causeway was built between Spike Island and Haulbowline to facilitate the prisoners and their supervisors to gain access to and from their work. This wooden causeway has long disappeared.

- 2.3 In 1883 the prison closed and it reverted back to a military establishment but it reverted to a prison/interment centre during the War of Independence. The island remained in British control until 11th July 1938 and then the Department of Defence took control of it. It became a military detention centre and the Irish Naval Service also used it as a training base. The 12 pounder guns were removed by the military and relocated to Fort Davies.
- 2.4 In 1985 Fort Mitchel was handed over from the Department of Defence to the Department of Justice and the Prison Service has been operating it since then.
- 2.5 The prisoners who occupied the prison in the mid 1980's were accommodated in dormitory type accommodation with between 8-15 per dormitory. These numbers in dormitory accommodation was extremely difficult to manage especially at night time when staffing levels were not at their full compliment. A riot took place and a lot of damage was done to the buildings as a result. However no escapes took place arising from the riot.
- 2.6 It was decided then to place the prisoners held there in cellular accommodation which is the practice to the present time. A lot of refurbishment work has taken place on the cells and general buildings including a new kitchen. The educational and administrative accommodation has been renovated and updated as well as the water storage facilities. The centre square land was filled and grassed, plus

several other works such as the main gate area, the visitors waiting and visiting rooms etc.

2.7 There is a contract with a boat ferrying company to bring staff, prisoners, visitors, workers etc daily to and from Cobh and Haulbowline to the island. This boat operates almost hourly from 7.50a.m until 23.45p.m. A barge is also hired to have heavy materials, articles, transport, etc brought onto the island.

2.8 There is a small area of the island in which the Department of Agriculture used to hold animals in quarantine but this is seldom now used.

3. GOVERNORS BRIEFING

3.1 The Governor and Assistant Governor met the Inspector and his advisor and assistant. He stated that the capacity of the prison was 102 and on the first day of our inspection the population was 93 with 3 on temporary release. The accommodation consists of 25 cells which can hold 4 in each plus 2 single cells. There is in-cell sanitation in all of the cells except the two single ones.

3.2 All cells were refurbished in the late 1980's. There are two observation cells while may be used at night as well as three isolation cells which are seldom used and never at night. TV is available in all the cells which has made a huge difference regarding the prisoners conduct and well-being. The younger prisoners are showered and use the reception area at a different

time to those over 18 years of age. There are three recreation yards in which handball and soccer are played.

- 3.3 As regards the enforcement of the proposed law regarding cigarettes, the attitude of the prison Governor which the Inspector fully supports is “the cell is the prisoners home”. Surely he can smoke in his own home. To try and make the entire prison free of all cigarettes would produce a nightmare scenario and would be very stressful for those prisoners who are addicted to that weed.

The island is owned now by the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform. There are goats, ducks, hens and cats on the Island.

- 3.4 The prison is situated on top of the hill of Spike Island and is surrounded by a moat plus very substantial walls. On entering at the main gate which leads into a large open space that contains some of the ruins of the military barracks which were destroyed prior to the Department of Justice taking charge of it. Another stone building was destroyed by a fire during a riot there in mid 1980's and has not been repaired since. We were informed that these buildings are structurally sound and could be rebuilt.

- 3.5 A new system of no contact on visits was introduced about 2 and a half years ago. This action was taken to control the smuggling of illegal substances into the prison. It has had a very positive effect and has kept the drugs problem to a minimum. Each prisoner has two visits per week but the prison

authorities would be sympathetic to an application for the third occasional visit in the same week.

3.6 Rumours of the possible closure of the prison is having a bad effect on staff, morale is low because of this. It must be said that there is no solid information with regard to Fort Mitchel being closed.

3.7 The building of a bridge to Spike Island could open up the full potential of this prison. The Governor said the costs of the bridge was estimated at approximately €20 million, the hire of the boat to bring staff and others on and off the island was €1350 per day plus a retainer costs for the use of a barge on occasions. All of the staff were on an island allowance of €1,350 each per year.

3.8 The Governor said he was very happy with the education service provided by 10 full time and 7 part time teachers. There is only one probation officer attached to Fort Mitchel and the Governor feels that the prison badly needs the appointment of a second officer. He said there is a very good relationship between the prison staff the probation and welfare service and the education staff.

3.9 There is one part time Catholic chaplain attached to Fort Mitchel and he is also the chaplain to the nearby Irish Naval base. The Governor said he was happy with the medical services provided to the prisoners. A number of senior officers at Fort Mitchel have recently been promoted and the

Governor is sorry at losing such experienced officers. There had been no escapes from the prison and there had been one suicide since the prison opened 18 years ago. The staff and prisoners have run a marathon race within the prison for the past four years to raise funds for the Chernobyl children. The children are brought in each year and presented with the funds raised. Infact they visited on one of the days of our inspection and had a football match verses the people from the prison. It was a delightful sight. The managers of the Ballycotton ten road race come into the prison to supervise and organise the run.

4. **STATISTICAL INFORMATION**

(Prisoners)

4.1	Prison's total cell capacity	102
	Number of single cells	2
	Number of 4 person cells (25 x 4)	25
	Number of "isolation" cells	3
	Number of "time out" or strip cells	2
	Number prisoners in custody (on date of completing Info)	94
	Number of prisoners on temporary release	1
	Number of foreign national prisoners (Great Britain)	1
	Number of prisoners serving sentences	94 (+1 T.R)

4.2 **Sentence Profile**

Number serving sentences up to 12 months	33
Number serving sentences over 12 months and up to and including 2 years	27
Number serving sentences over 2 years and up to and including 4 years	22
Number serving sentences over 4 years and up to and including 7 years	9
Number serving sentences over 7 years and up to and including 10 years	3
Numbers serving sentences over 10 years	Nil
Numbers serving life sentences	<u>Nil</u>
	94

4.3 **Age Profile**

Number of prisoners aged 16,17 and 18 years old	26
Number of prisoners aged 19,20 and 21 years old	29
Number of prisoners aged 22,23,24,25 years old	20
Number of prisoners aged 26,27,28,29 and 30 years old	12
Number of prisoners aged 31 to 35 years old	1
Number of prisoners aged 36 to 40 years old	4
Number of prisoners aged 41 to 45 years old	0
Number of prisoners aged 46 to 50 years old	1
Number of prisoners aged 51 years to 60 years old	1
Number of prisoners aged 61 years or older	<u>Nil</u>
	94

All of the cells except the two single cells and the isolation or strip cells have in-cell sanitary facilities fitted. [Toilets and wash hand basins]

All of the cells except the isolation and strip cells have a television.

4.4 **Staff**

Governor	1
Assistant Governor	1
Chief Officer	1
Chief Trades Officer	1
Clerk (Grade I)	1
Assistant Chief Officer	7
Assistant Chief Officer (detail duties)	1
Clerk (Grade II)	4
Prison Officers	62
Trades Officers	6
Industrial Supervisor	1
Medical Orderlies (prison officers)	6
Assistant Industrial Supervisors	2
Job Sharing	(1)

4.5 **Other staff working in the prison but not “prison staff”**

Doctor (2 doctors job sharing)	one attends for one hour each day Monday-Friday
Psychiatrist	6 hours monthly
Dentist	½ day per month
Psychologist	3 and a half hours weekly

Optician	As required
Dietician	Nil [use local hospital if required]
Probation and Welfare Officer	1 (Daily Monday to Friday)
Teachers (full time)	10 Monday to Friday
Do (Part time)	7 attend on various days during week
Chaplain (R.C. Part time and Other religions as required)	1 Part time (R.C)

5. TOUR OF INSPECTION

5.1 *Cell Accommodation*

The entrance to the A and B cellular accommodation is by an uncovered walled in yard where there is a staff toilet and wash hand basin installed.

- 5.1(a) On entering the building there is a room for the Chief Officer and the Assistant Chief Officers in which is located the staffs walkie talkie radio systems, controls for the television/video channels in the prisoners cells, safes and other security equipment. Report and record books are also held there. Close by is the A.C.O's locker room and the plant house and equipment for the supply of power to the entire building.
- 5.1(b) On passing through the staff controlled circle gate a Class Officer's office is situated off the centre of the building dividing A and B cell accommodation corridors. This office is used by the Class Officers in charge of the A and B wings. It is also used by the Governor to see prisoners on Governors parade and at times by other professionals who wish to conduct interviews with prisoners.

5.1(c) The A division cell accommodation is situated to the left of the circle gate entrance and consist of 10 X 4 person cells and 2 x1 person cells. All of the cells except the 2 single cells have a toilet and wash hand basin. They also have a large and small window in each of them. There is a large radiator in each and all have been fitted with a tv. The t.v channels are centrally controlled. The beds were made by the local trades staff and are bolted to the cell floors. The wire/spring base are welded to the bed frames - so they are very secure. There are four single beds in each of the four person cells. The two single cells have no toilet or wash hand basin but there is both a toilet and wash hand basin immediately outside the cell doors on the corridor. There is an observation panel in both the doors and the walls of the cells to enable the staff to observe the entire inside of the cells. Each cell is fitted with a push button call system which activates a red light outside the cell door as well as displaying a light on the control panel board in the circle area. When the cell button is activated the red light outside the door remains on until switched off by a member of staff at the cell door. The brick walls of the cells are extremely wide and all of the floors are tiled. The cells are clean and reasonably tidy with posters of all tastes placed all over the walls. They are reasonably bright although some have posters over part of the windows which prevents some of the light from getting in.

5.1(d) Close to the circular end of the division there is a room off the main corridor which contains five showers and a bath. Each of the showers and bath area is divided by a tiled wall and there are tiles on the floor. There is a latted

seat attached along one of the walls. The area was clean and tidy but there was no non slip matting outside of the showers or bath to prevent slipping.

5.1(e) A recreation area is located at the end of the A division corridor and it was being painted on the day of inspection. It contained a large covered in tv and chairs. There were two phones there for prisoners use as well as a toilet and wash hand basin. The floor was tiled and it was clean and tidy.

5.1(f) A door from the recreation hall leads into the A exercise yard the surface of which was tarred. Goal posts were painted on the two walls and an area on the surface of the yard was lined with painted lines for playing handball. The Inspectorate was informed that soccer and handball was the most common games played in the yard by the prisoners. It is quite a large yard with a barrier mesh placed all around the top of the walls.

5.2. B DIVISION

5.2(a) *Servery area for prisoners meals*

The corridor leading into the B division is directly opposite the A division corridor. The servery for the serving of meals to the prisoners held in the both the A and B classes is located just off the B corridor adjacent to the circle gate area. There are two doors one for entry by the prisoners to collect their meals on a tray and another door for exit having collected their meals and return to their cells. The meals are cooked in the prison kitchen and then transported by a specially renovated van to the servery areas. The servery area is all laid out with stainless steel equipment and the walls are

covered with white rock material. The floor is tiled and the entire area is very clean and tidy. There is a small storage facility at the back of the servery area which contains a fridge that holds milk, orange juices etc. There are two large hot water boilers, which are protected by a sliding stainless steel grid for security reasons, at the side of the servery for the prisoners tea, coffee, etc.

5.2(b) ***Special observation/strip cells***

The first door on the B corridor from the circle end leads into the area where there are two special single observation cells or strip cells. There is a corridor outside the cell doors where there are presses for holding the prisoners clothing who are placed in these special cells. There is a timber base bed with the sides of them also covered in timber and attached to the floor in both cells. Both have a mattress and a special blanket. They have no toilet or wash hand basin within them and the windows are covered with perspex sheeting. They are heated by a large central heating pipe which passes through them and each have a plastic chamber pot. There is a press button/call alarm system within both of them.

5.2(c) The Inspectorate were informed that the special cells were used very rarely and when they were used it was only for a short period of time. On examining the records of those detained there - some were held for a few hours, others for a day or two, while the longest seemed to be for six days. It was explained that the person held for the six days had requested to be left there as he was afraid for his own safety from other prisoners.

- 5.2(d) In some of the recordings, the records did not state the time or date the person was removed from the strip cell and the Inspector strongly recommends that such recordings should be made at the time of the removal and kept up to date.
- 5.2(e) The B class cell accommodation is exactly the same as described on the A class with cells on both sides of the corridor leading to a recreation hall at the end and from there onto the exercise yard. The cell accommodation consists of 9 X 4 person cells and the two special cells as already mentioned. There is a toilet, wash hand basin and tv in all of the cells. They were clean and reasonably tidy. The recreation hall had the same facilities as A class with large tv, chairs and phones for prisoners use. The exercise yard was quite large with 15 prisoners within it on the day of inspection. The officers supervising the prisoners were located behind a clear perspex sheeting which had been erected by the trades staff to prevent the staff being struck with footballs. The top of the walls in the yard have barrier mesh fitted to them.

5.3 C DIVISION

5.3(a) *Cell Accommodation*

The C class cellular accommodation is situated in a separate area of Fort Mitchel away from the A and B class cell blocks. Entrance is via an open air walled in courtyard and an officer controlled gate. The design is similar to the A and B class with cells on both sides of a central corridor with recreation hall on the end of the corridor and an exercise yard off the recreation area.

It contains 6 X 4 person cells with toilets, wash hand basins and televisions on all of them. The beds in the cells are bolted to three cement supports underneath the base and are the same height off the floors as the other beds which have leg supports. There are electrical operated radiators in each cell. The recreation hall has chairs with large covered in tv, phones for prisoner use, toilets, wash hand basin and hand dryer. The exercise yard is smaller than the other two exercise yards. Again they play soccer and hand ball with goal posts painted on each of the end walls and an area on the ground with white painted lines for hand ball. There is also a protective perspex sheeting area for the staff to supervise the prisoners. The cells, recreation hall and exercise yards were clean and fairly tidy.

5.3(b) There are two showers just off the corridor which had the walls and floors tiled. One of the showers is fitted for invalid use. The area was clean and tidy but there was no non slip mat on the floor which may prevent someone from slipping.

5.3(c) There is a plant room off the corridor which stores electrical controls of the buildings as well as hot water storage tanks and a small general storage area. There is also a staff toilet and another small store room.

The entrance area or foyer is used as a class officer's office as well as a servery area for the prisoners meals. The meals are brought by a specially fitted out van from the kitchen and placed in the stainless steel servery holders. The prisoners collect their meals on trays from the servery area and return to the cells to eat. The small stainless steel serving facility is just

adequate but needs to be updated as it is located in an open area with both prisoners and staff passing by on a regular basis. The fact that it is an open area makes it much more difficult to maintain good hygiene standards. There are no tiles or white rock materials on the walls. The Inspector recommends that a more suitable location is found for the serving of prisoners meals.

5.4 *Mitchel Block (Isolation Cells)*

5.4(a) The Mitchel block is located between the A ,B and C cell blocks in a stand alone building. Three cells within this block have been renovated to hold disruptive prisoners, although the Governor and staff have assured us that the prisoners are not detained there over night. There is a corridor outside of the three cell doors with an electric radiator and off the corridor are two toilets with wash hand basin and a radiator on the wall. The area has been freshly painted and is very clean. Within the cells there are timber based closed in beds attached to the floor as well as a chamber pot. The cell windows are covered in perspex and the ceilings are extremely high with electric heater positioned very high up on the wall, completely out of the reach of any prisoner held within it. There is no call system bell push inside the cells, however, we were ensured that while the prisoners are being detained there, an officer is always in the corridor immediately outside the door. On checking the records available for those located in the Mitchel block, the Inspector found that it was used 12 times since January 2003. The records also show that nobody was detained there overnight.

5.5 ***Gate/office Main Gate and General Area adjacent to Main Gate***

The officer in charge of the main gate area operates both the outer and the inner gates and allows access to visitors whose waiting room is just off the main gate area. There is an office for the main gate officer to keep records books etc and off this area there is an office where close circuit television screens are located. The officers can view the proceedings in the areas that the C.C.T.V covers as well as the visiting box areas. There is a staff toilet with wash hand basin just off this area.

5.5(a) ***Holding Cell***

A corridor at the side of the office leads to a holding cell where committals or those returning off temporary release are detained until such time as they are accepted into the prison. It is quite a small area clean and tidy with seating along the walls.

5.5(b) ***“Screen Visits” area***

Another corridor at the back of the gate office leads to the room where screen visits are conducted. The room would hold three or four prisoners at a time. There is a large wide counter with seating permanently fixed to the floor at both sides of the counter and sheeting going from the top of the counter to the ceiling. In order to conduct communications with the person on the other side of the glass screen, one has to speak through a grid in the counter top.

5.5(c) ***Professional Visiting facilities***

Another corridor at the back of the screen visit area leads to the professional visiting box which contains tables, chairs and seating for both prisoners and professionals. There is an observation panel within the wall so that when the business is being conducted within the visiting box the officer outside can not hear what is going on but can observe the prisoner while the visit is taking place.

5.5(d) ***Visitors Waiting Area***

The visitors waiting area is located in a large room just off the main gate entrance. There is seating placed around the walls of the room, its tiled and freshly painted. There are notice boards and visiting regulations placed all around the walls for visitors to read and observe while waiting to be called in on the visit. The room is also covered by close circuit tv. There are two toilets with wash hand basin just off the waiting room area and its quite a large fresh bright room, quite pleasant.

5.5(e) ***Visiting Room Area***

A door from the waiting room area leads one into the visiting room. This visiting area is quite a large room with a very wide leaf table going down the centre of the room. It has a one and a half foot high grid of perspex sheeting placed permanently down the centre of the table. There is strictly no contact allowed between visitor and prisoner which we were informed, is strictly enforced. Seats which are stationary to the floor are placed on both sides of the large table and there are notices all around the walls reminding all of the

rules and regulations pertaining to visits. There are officers observation seats at both ends of the table which are on a higher level to the chairs or seating facilities that are attached to the floor. There is also a close circuit television camera in operation throughout the duration of the visits. The room was freshly painted, clean and tidy and quite bright with a large window at the end.

5.6 ***Workshops***

The Inspectorate next visited the workshop which is non functional for some time as a result of no officer to take charge of same. We were informed that they have advertised for an officer to take charge of this workshop on a Monday to Friday basis several times but have had no response to the applications. The first room we entered consisted of five sewing machines which were used for making pullovers and jumpers for prisoners and just off this area through an archway was a towelling workshop area with a large work bench down the centre of the room. There was cutting equipment there to cut lengths of towelling off a large roll and we were informed that this shop only opens very occasionally when the need for towelling and tea towels arises. It is a pity that this workshop facility is not in operation as it is the only workshop available within the entire prison. I wonder if the authorities could have the post advertised Nationally as there may be some officer willing to take up the position who is based outside of Fort Mitchel. It could be looked at by Prison Service Headquarters.

5.7 ***Plastic tunnel garden***

The Inspectorate then entered the plastic tunnel garden where there was one prisoner working almost full time watering plants, flowers, flower seeds etc. The tunnel garden grows flowers from seeds as well as tomatoes, green peppers etc. An instructor comes in twice per week to give instructions in basic horticultural lessons. These lessons are organised via the school. The commodities that are grown there such as the tomatoes, green peppers etc, are used in the prison kitchen while the flowers are set around the grounds and in window boxes which are a wonderful colourful sight at present.

Just outside the tunnel garden area there is an open air kitchen garden where they grow onions, carrots, parsnips, potatoes, lettuce, beetroot, strawberries and even apple trees. There is a prisoner working there at least a half a day per week and the contents of these fruits and vegetables are again used in the prison kitchen.

5.8 ***Tuck shop***

This is quite a small area which appears to stock the normal tuck shop requirements. We were informed that it is open five days per week Monday to Friday. They can purchase the normal daily and provincial newspapers as well as magazines. We questioned if the full range of provincial newspapers were available but was informed that if the shop in Cobh did not stock it, then they could not have it

5.9 ***Reception area***

The reception area is where all new committals are processed as well as all those that are being discharged or going out on temporary release, hospital appointments etc. The area has a counter with record books and a computer as well as two showers, sink, toilet, changing and searching area, and a locker room which contains the clothes plus private property of all the prisoners held there. On the arrival of a new committal their personal clothes are taken and they are issued with one set of prison clothing which consist of a shirt, trousers, jumpers, shoes, runners, three sets of underwear, socks, toothpaste and soap. Their entire personal property and belongings is logged onto the computer system. In the event that a prisoner wishes to wear his own clothes, he must provide three full sets of clothing. He will then be issued with two sets . The arrangements regarding laundering for those wearing their own clothes is that the dirty laundry is bagged and tagged and left at the gate for handing out to visitors in exchange for another clean set which are left in for him.

The laundry requirements of the prison is sent out weekly to a local laundry in Cobh which includes bed clothing, towels, tea towels, shirts, underwear. The officer in charge stated that the computer system is slower than the previous manual recording system which results in some of the work being done manually and then when the time is available it is logged onto the computer. This is a dual system that is in operation which is not very satisfactory.

There is a laundry room on the ground floor area of the reception which contains two washers and two dryers, one of the washers is out of order and the second washer is not working properly. So for all tense and purposes the laundry facility is out of order. The officer stated that they are expecting replacement equipment to be installed shortly. There is a staff toilet and wash hand basin within the area and the entire reception/laundry was clean and tidy.

5.10 ***Staff Mess/Canteen***

The staff mess is operated by an officer in charge with the assistance of five prisoners working with him and it is open from 8.00a.m until 6.00p.m daily. The main meal is served at 4.45p.m while light lunch is served during the day and the system is cash payment on receipt of meal. There is a reasonably small dining area which consists of five tables and four or five chairs at each table. It is clean and tidy. Passing from this area into another corridor there is a small kitchen to cater for self catering staff or married staff as it may be referred too. The kitchen and its surrounding area is quite small, however the staff say it is quite sufficient for the numbers who use it. Off this area there is a small laundry room. Down the corridor there is a "non smokers" tv room which consists of 11 arm chairs and two coffee tables in the centre of the floor. Further down the corridor there is a staff locker room which also has four showers and toilets. The main kitchen off the dining areas is fully equipped, laid out with stainless steel tops and serveries, all the area is tiled and it is kept very hygienically clean. Then passing down the corridor further one reaches a "smoking" television room with 16 arm chairs

and two coffee tables in the centre of the room, which was maintained in a reasonably clean and tidy condition. Adjacent to the t.v room there is a prisoners' locker room and toilet. Proceeding to another corridor one enters a staff snooker room which has a full size snooker table and a vending machine for soft drinks. This is a fine sized area with plenty of space around the snooker table.

We then proceeded to an area on the second floor which is known as the Mitchel hall and it is used as a staff training area. This is a very large hall with a beautiful timber floor and we were informed that in the time that the army personnel were in residence it was used as a dance hall. Control and restrain, B.A as well as other staff training now takes place in it. It is also used for meetings. Off the Mitchel hall there is a corridor which leads to the staff accommodation section which consists of ten bedrooms. There is also a training room in which computer training is conducted as well as the staff liaison officer's room.

5.11 ***Main Kitchen Area***

The Inspectorate team arrived at the main kitchen area and was greeted by the head chef and the second officer assisting. The Inspectorate team were issued with white coats and hats. The staff involved were very forthcoming in answering questions on any aspect of the kitchen area. The first area visited was the delivery areas which is at the rear of the kitchen. All of the meat that is received into the kitchen is frozen as are most of the vegetables. These items are then stored in the fridges, freezer, or dry store. We then

went to the chefs office where the normal office equipment facilities are available such as files, filing cabinet desk etc. The Inspectorate team then proceeded into the preparation area where the vegetables are prepared for cooking. This area is tiled with white rock walls and all stainless steel equipment. It was very clean and tidy and very well maintained.

We then entered the main kitchen area which is quite large. Very high standards of hygiene were evident. All of the area is very well marked out in the various zones, such as, zone one being the vegetable area, zone two being salads, zone three being the fish area, zone four being the raw meats, zone five being the cooked food area and six being the pastry. The entire kitchen is equipped with stainless steel work tops etc. There are two combi ovens gas and electric cookers. Nine prisoners and two officers work within this area. The kitchen ceiling is of the "Hadel" style which has an intake of fresh air from the outside panel areas of the ceiling and an out put of hot air from the centre panels of the kitchen over the cooking areas. There was a great freshness of air within the kitchen and a noticeable air flow/air change while we were there. The food when cooked is placed in a specially converted food van and delivered to the 2 cell blocks. The cooked food is discharged out one of the back doors while the returned dirty delph is brought in another back door to avoid contamination.

We then proceeded down a corridor off the kitchen area which consisted of a staffs tea room and it also had a storage area for the prisoners whites. Further down the corridor there was a prisoners tea room or smoke room

and off this room there was another room which contained two w.c's, two showers and laundry storage area. There was also a laundry/ironing room available for prisoners' whites who work there. Further down the corridor there was both a male and female staff toilet with wash hand basin, shower and lockers for kitchen staff's use. There is also a separate entrance for staff when coming on duty where they change into their whites, special shoes, hats, and then proceed into the kitchen area.

There is no separate training kitchen for the purpose of training prisoners who work in the kitchen. The training is conducted within the main kitchen itself. We were given a copy of a catering audit which was carried out on the 23rd July by Failte Eireann (Cert) Pat Stafford conducted same along with Edel Jones of Failte Ireland. It is clear from the catering audit carried out that massive improvements have been achieved in the whole kitchen preparation, food servery areas at Fort Mitchel. Certainly it is a credit to all concerned. The grade obtained in this audit as compared to the previous audit is noticeable for example in the previous audit under structure hygiene they received a C and in this audit they received a B. Operation hygiene previous audit an E this audit a B. Food storage and protection, previous audit E present audit B. Staff facilities and personal hygiene, previous audit an E this audit a B. Hygiene management, previous audit a D this audit a B and the overall grade the previous time was an E and this time it is a B. B represents 90% to 94% which is credited as a very good standard. The overall audit summary outlines the following:-

“There has been positive improvement in the whole area of food service. The physical structure of the servery area at the block has undergone a transformation for the better. The standard of structural and operational hygiene in this area is very good”.

“The food service procedures are greatly improved. Only trained catering officers assisted by trained kitchen offenders serve out the food. The practice of a discipline officer untrained has been eliminated”.

“Report methods and procedures have been improved. Currently offenders assist in all aspect of food production operation, from the delivery of food to the kitchen, through to storage, preparation, production and service”.

“Catering training for offenders continue to improve”.

“Recent improvement could only be made by the support of management and the commitment of staff. It is vital to the improvement of the catering operation that this support and commitment continues and catering standards at the kitchen can be deemed best practice in catering”.

The Inspectorate team partook of the prisoners meals during the course of their inspection and found them to be reasonably tasty and well presented. However, the burgers were extremely hard and tasteless. The Failte Ireland report is most encouraging and great credit is due to all concerned in raising the standards to their present level.

5.12 **Stores**

The stores area is operated by two Clerk II's. They have a reasonably well laid out office and they still operate the old cardex system. The computers

have been installed but to date there is no package programme installed within them. The work consists of the supplying of victualling, trades requirements and the general needs of the prison such as cleaning materials etc. The recording of intake of goods, recording of output of goods, seeking suppliers and payment of accounts falls within their remit. The Inspectorate were shown around the storage facilities some of which was cramped, but overall, it is like any well run stores, good layout, well labelled and easy to find things, so overall it appears to be a well managed stores.

5.13 **Office**

The Inspectorate visited the office which is divided in two sections, one of which is the general office, while the other deals with personnel matters and prison general accounts. In the general office there are two Clerk II's while in the personnel office there is a Clerk I operating who has the supervisory responsibilities of the Clerk II's in the general office and stores area. The general office is quite spacious well laid out and most modern. The general office staff deal with prisoners files, applications for the courts, temporary release, bails etc. On questioning regarding the computers they are operating quite satisfactory and are quite happy with them. In the personnel office, which is operated by the Clerk I, who deals with staff files, staff personnel matters, as well as the cash operation for the prison. We were informed that the computers are being further updated and in particular the sick leave records. The new programme is known as the HRMS systems and they are to become "live" on the 10th October. This new system will require further training and one afternoons training has been allocated for

the staff concerned. We were also informed that the medical records are starting to become operational but are not as yet fully "live". Again this office was quite spacious, newly decorated, with all the modern facilities of an office.

5.14 ***Library***

The library is operated by a prison officer and is open five days per week morning and afternoons. The books are supplied from Cork County library and an outside librarian comes in three to four times per year to give advice and to update the books. The library operates audio tapes and newspapers and some magazines. They claim that it gets well used particularly the tapes.

6. MEETINGS WITH VARIOUS GROUPS / INDIVIDUALS

6.1 ***Meeting with the Dentist***

A meeting took place with the dentist who confirmed that he attends one day a month. He is also the dentist to Cork Prison. His former receptionist who is now retired helps as his aid and he is trying to take his new secretary into the service. He is satisfied with the equipment and states that if he has any problems with same the trades officer is fantastic at meeting his requests and repairing things or procuring replacement for them. He agreed that he can not indulge in elaborate treatment. He has done some root canal fillings but that is very rare. He normally does extractions and fillings. He did not know whether he did more of one than the other as he had not got the records with him. He has been attached to the prison more or less since it

started. He is very satisfied with his relationship with the prisoners, the prison staff, the Governor and has no criticism. He does not provide extensive treatment as it requires a great deal of attention and it is not a suitable place where prisoners are being moved from one prison to another. The picture which emerges in all the prisons seems to be basically the dentist provides extraction and filling services only, although he had agreed he had done root surgery on two occasions. He always attended in a case of emergency immediately. He provides a similar service to that provided to medical card holders within the community.

6.2 *Meeting with Chaplain*

The R.C. Chaplain to Fort Mitchel operates on a part time basis as he also has responsibilities at the nearby naval base at Haulbowline. He said he had no issues or complaints with regard to the running of Fort Mitchel and that his general overview would be of a positive nature. He said he gets great support from the Governor and staff. He believes that there is very good co-operation between staff and prisoners. He said the open space with green grass and a water feature offer some sort of normality within the boundaries of a prison environment. He is in favour of the further development of Spike Island which has great potential but any such project would have to be proceeded by the building of a bridge to the island.

6.3 *Meeting with Members of Visiting Committee*

The Inspector had a meeting with two members of the prison visiting committee. They were very supportive of local management and were

happy overall with the running of the institution. They outlined that the full committee met once per month and that two members also visit unannounced once per month. They have highlighted the need for a workshop and for prisoners to be taught a trade within the workshop, perhaps to replace some of the educational classes with trades/instructor classes. They were opposed to the only workshop attached to the prison which manufactured jumpers and towels being closed. Otherwise, they felt it was a well run, caring prison.

They wished to meet the Inspector again, perhaps in his own offices in Grand Canal Street, in due course.

6.4 ***Meeting with Senior Officials “Heads of Service”***

The Heads of Service included the Assistant Governor, the Clerk in charge of Office and Stores, the Chief Trades Officer and the Chief Officer. They were all very concerned about the future of the prison. Naturally they were opposed to its closure for valid and personal reasons. They denied that drugs were a problem. They did admit that I learned earlier that there were some drugs such as hash, ecstasy, cannabis which had manifested themselves very occasionally. They also denied if there were any homosexuality among the prisoners. Infact if there was any hint of same it would be denounced by the other prisoners and described as “queers”. Peer pressure alone would prevent it.

One official noted that I had criticised the Prison Service in my annual report. One officer mentioned a paragraph in my report where I had said there was

far too much bureauacy in the Irish Prison Service. He told me that in the previous week, three different Prison Service headquarters people had asked exactly the same question. Personally this was a total waste of man power and was extremely irritating. The headquarters should be able to communicate between each other and they should have all the information already on computer. He asked me to repeat my disapproval of this display of "empire building" which I discussed at length in my first report. At a time when civil servants or perhaps I should call them public servants are supposed to be providing productivity they produce chaos.

6.5 ***Meeting with the Probation and Welfare Officers***

The Inspectorate had a meeting with the senior Probation and Welfare Officer who has responsibility for Cork Prison as well as Fort Mitchel. He was accompanied by the Probation and Welfare Officer attached to Fort Mitchel. The senior is only recently appointed to the position and it is his intention to attend at Fort Mitchel one and a half days per week. He presents as a very able-bodied figure and very much a hands-on person.

There is one full-time Probation and Welfare officer appoint to Fort Mitchel. She is in this position for the past 14 months approximately. Prior to her arrival Fort Mitchel had no Probation and Welfare Officer for a seven month period. The present officer is being transferred next October and her replacement will arrive one week before she leaves for her new appointment in order to have a smooth hand over of files, case histories, etc.

It is felt that one more full-time Probation and Welfare Officer is needed for Fort Mitchel to provide a proper follow through service. They said they had good links with the community in trying to find accommodation and jobs for prisoners on release. They work in co-operation with the linkage officer based in Cork City. They also have strong links with the education services at the prison and work closely with the post release planning programme committee which they attend one day every two weeks.

They are involved in multidisciplinary meetings such as the suicide awareness and bullying programmes committees.

They see Fort Mitchel as having great potential if developed further and it could be used as a training centre in co-operation with FAS to achieve appropriate certification which could lead to job opportunities for prisoners on release.

6.6 ***Meeting with the Teaching Staff***

Teaching facilities

The Inspectorate inspected the teaching facilities and met with the Head Teacher and a number of her colleagues. Classes were in progress at the time of our visit and this afforded us an opportunity to observe the educational and training programme in operation.

We were impressed by the fact that the teaching facilities were in a dedicated block. The facilities were of an acceptable standard: the rooms were reasonably equipped and were in a good state of repair. The thought had occurred that some of the rooms might have been on the small side but we received no complaint along these lines. On the other hand, it was

pointed out that additional space for one-to one sessions with prisoners had recently become available: This is welcome as it more readily facilities literacy training and other such programmes of instruction.

I found the teaching staff to be dedicate and highly motivated. Morale seemed to be high. The quality of the facilities and resources probably contributes to this, but other factors such as good leadership and individual personal qualities must be acknowledged.

Courses available include art, music, computer training, cooking, sewing, woodwork and gardening. Some prisoners availed of the opportunity to pursue courses leading to awards such as the Junior Certificate and NCVA. [Although three to four subjects were taken in the leaving cert with two or one subjects being taken in the Junior Cert]. Courses in literacy training, anger management, alcohol awareness and men's health are also provided. It is worth noting that the teaching staff is involved in the "welfare" type courses and there does not seem to be a rigid demarcation between teaching staff and probation and welfare staff.

Overall we were left with a favourable impression of the teaching facilities and courses offered. Prisoners' observations bore this out and they reported that there were plenty of opportunities available.

6.7 ***Meeting with POA***

The Inspector met three members of the Prison Officers Association one of whom told me that I had no power and that I could change nothing. I agreed he had a point but that "the pen is mightier than the sword" and can be very powerful in getting people to think. One official was very critical of the

Catholic and Protestant chaplains. He said only six went to mass and they were all itinerants (racism?) However the Governor says that if a person suffers a trauma e.g death in the family the chaplain was always quickly on the scene if required. He was also opposed to religion being taught which is not infact specifically taught. He enquired if I approved of the policy of not teaching religion to which I responded that if anyone wished to learn religion they should study religious history or philosophy but one should not be forced to study a subject they did not want. He also complained of the Church of Ireland Rector not attending to the needs of three members of his congregation. These complaints about the Chaplains appears to represents a personal view and not necessary the P.O.A's.

6.8 ***Meeting with Prisoners***

- 6.8(a) Two of the Inspectorate team met a group of eight prisoners and spoke with them for approximately an hour and a half. A range of issues relating to the prison regime was discussed. In general, the prisoners reported that the person environment was relaxed and that a “laid back” atmosphere pervaded. It was considered to be one of the better prisons in the system. Some specific points should be mentioned.
- 6.8(b) ***Drugs:*** a number of prisoners admitted to having been drug users or having alcohol problems prior to their being imprisoned. The prisoners reported that Spike Island was “99%” drug free and that the prison was as “clean” as possible. In general we got the impression that the prisoners were happy with this state of affairs (although it must be admitted that they would be

unlikely to express a preference to us for a regime where drugs were easily available).

- 6.8(c) **Visits:** some prisoners complained that they were not allowed close contact with their family during visits and expressed a wish that they could hold their children. However, they did seem to acknowledge that the current policy contributed to the drug free environment. They outlined that the visitors visiting area was quite noisy on busy days with the result that prisoners and their visitors find it difficult to converse. They stated that at times they got a “box” visit such as on the occasion of a child’s first communion.
- 6.8(d) **Telephones:** it was observed that the telephone located in the school block was unavailable. It was not clear whether the telephone was broken or had been disconnected but the prisoners considered this to be an inconvenience. [The phone had been disconnected at the request of the teachers so that the prisoners would not be leaving the class rooms and causing disruption]. It was also reported that telephones sometimes cut out during the during the course of a call. The prisoners also stated that calls to legal advisors count towards their daily allocation: in other words, a prisoner might find himself in the position of having to choose between telephoning his solicitor or his family on a particular day. Perhaps telephone calls to legal advisors should be considered additional to the daily allocation.
- 6.8(e) **Food:** In general, the prisoners seemed happy with the overall quality of the food. However, they were strongly of the view that the evening meal (taken at c. 4.30 p.m.) was inadequate. The quantities were said to be meagre and insufficient to sustain a person until the following morning. The prisoners were attracted to the idea of serving the main meal of the day in the evening

with a lighter meal being served at lunchtime. The Inspector recommends that consideration should be given to this rearrangement, at least on a trial basis, and in agreement with other Governor's prisons for the sake of uniformity.

6.8(f) **Laundry:** prisoners reported that the washing machine was broken with the consequence that they had to wash and dry their own laundry manually in their cells. They also had to dry their clothes on the radiator in the cell resulting in steam and dampness in the air in the cell. Moreover, washing materials, such as detergent, were not supplied and some prisoners said that they were forced to use shampoo as a substitute. If this is the case, this state of affairs is unjustifiable and the Inspector recommends that it should be remedied without delay. [Washing in cells is not permitted under the Health and Safety regulations. If prisoners use their own clothes their families and not the prison are responsible for their laundry]

6.8(g) **Medical Services:** Prisoners report lengthy delays in getting an appointment to see the psychiatrist, psychologist or dentist. In the case of short-term prisoners it was stated that dental treatment, such as fillings, is not available. Apparently it is felt that since the course of treatment would exceed the duration of the sentence it was not worth initiating. Some prisoners also complained of the unavailability of a doctor from mid/late-afternoon until the following day and expressed the view that the services of the medical orderlies were insufficient. They reported that no medication was made available, even for headache by the medics. They stated that they had to accept public health spectacle frames although they were willing to pay the difference in price of such frames and those of their own choice but were not

allowed. [Management state that prisoners can purchase their own spectacles if they so desire and can pay the difference in costs themselves]

6.8(h) **Tuck Shop:** the prisoners complained that the tuck shop stocks a narrow range of items. They were of the view that the stocking of food items, for example cooked meat would be a welcome addition. Most prisoners would also like vitamin supplements, such as “seven seas” to be made available in the shop. Difficulty in obtaining some newspapers and magazines was also reported. [Vitamins can only be prescribed by the doctor and would not be dispensed by the tuck shop]

6.8(i) **Transfers:** some prisoners raised the question of being transferred. It was said that their families encountered difficulty in travelling to Cork on a regular basis. One prisoner reported that he had not received a visit in seven months due to the distance his family would have to travel.

6.8(j) **Cells:**

(1) The question of long sentence prisoner having to share cells with short sentence prisoners resulted in discontent for the long sentence prisoners as they “settled in” with their cell companion and then they were released. It left an unsettling effect on the long termers.

(2) They complained that there were no chairs in the cell resulting in them having to sit or lie on their beds during their long periods of lock up. They stated that it was difficult to eat their meals without a chair to sit on and that they had no back support if sitting on their beds. The Inspector recommends that chairs with back support be provided in the cells.

6.8(k) **The gym:** it was pointed out that the gym is open for one period daily in the a.m. The prisoners would like to see the gym open during both work/school periods and during evening recreation. I think that this a reasonable request in view of the age profile of the prisoners and the need to have them occupied. The Inspector recommends that the gym be opened for prisoners use in the p.m's and recreation periods.

6.8(l) **Other matters raised:**

- (1) No trades type work (instruction in plumbing, carpentry, etc) available and prisoners working with trades staff on maintenance within the prison, are not recognised as trades experience on release.
- (2) No workshops except one which is closed
- (3) Visiting Committee - stated if they put their name down to see them it could result in them being transferred.

6.8(m) **General Remarks concerning Meeting with Prisoners**

We formed a generally favourable impression of Fort Mitchel Prison. Many of the difficulties identified by the prisoners can probably be addressed at local level. The question of transfers raises a broader policy question that might have to be considered at a higher level.

In modern parlance prisoners should be seen as stakeholders in the system in that they are directly affected by decisions taken at managerial level. A forum that facilitates dialogue between prisoners and local management could result in many of the local issues that were addressed to us being resolved in a more speedy and flexible manner. At the same time it would afford

management the opportunity to explain policies and decisions to prisoners. I am aware that prisoners can air their grievances through other forums such as the visiting committees, High Court, Gardai, Minister, Prison Staff Probation and Welfare, Teachers, Chaplains etc but this forum many assist in the reduction of such applications and provide an opportunity to explain reasons for decisions or policies.

We were surprised that so few prisoners sought to meet with the Inspector's team: most of the prisoners we met were selected on the basis of our request to meet them. Those we met seemed to be unaware of our purpose or of the Inspector's function. I observed notices in the cell blocks and elsewhere which informed prisoners of the Inspector's visit but which did not specifically mention their entitlement to meet with the team.

7. HEALTH AND SAFETY/Fire Aspect

- 7.1 The Inspectorate had a meeting with the two senior staff members with responsibility for the fire aspects of Health and Safety and they were most helpful and forthcoming with the information sought.
- 7.2 Records were produced outlining dates and times that the various checks/examinations/maintenance was carried out by both outside contractors and trades staff into the various fire equipment/fire fighting apparatuses within the prison. The portable fire pumps, under ground fire pumps, fire extinguishers, fire alarms, colt smoke extractor systems, are all contracted to outside contractors for service, some of which are once per

year, others half yearly, and some quarterly. The local trades staff also check and maintain in good working order the fire extinguishers, the fire alarms, mobile fire pumps, hose reels, hydrants, and mains water supply on a weekly/monthly basis.

- 7.3 The fire brigade from Cobh, who are part time, are familiar with the institution yearly meetings take place to keep them updated. On the 15th August 2003 a meeting and familiarisation tour of the prison took place with the Fire Officer in Charge of Cobh Fire Brigade and the Assistant Chief Fire Officer for Cork County Council.
- 7.4 The fire fighting equipment in the prison would be used by the fire brigade personnel in the event of them being called to a fire as it would take too long to get their own equipment onto a barge to bring it across from Cobh to Spike Island. The Governor has secured special permission from the Harbour Commissioners for the use of their pilot boat in an emergency.
- 7.5 A full fire drill exercise took place on the 25th August 2003 in which the Fire Brigade personnel from Cobh travelled to Spike Island by pilot boat. The pilot boat can travel much faster than the boat used daily to and from the island. Infact, the response time of the brigade was excellent in the exercise as the call went out at 17.46 p.m they arrived on the island at 17.59 p.m and had water flowing on the mock fire by 18.02 p.m.

- 7.6 A fire evacuation drill exercise took place in the education unit on the 10th September 2003 in the a.m with fourteen teachers involved (no prisoners). They were also given a demonstration by the B.A. Instructor , at the assembly point in the use of hose reels, fire extinguishers, and their location within the education area.
- 7.7 A fire drill exercise took place in the B cell block on the 17th July 2003 at 9.20 a.m using night time staff scenarios in which 35 prisoners and six staff were evacuated to the assembly point. This exercise began at 9.20 a.m and completed at 9.25.50 a.m. This was a reasonable time for such an evacuation.
- A smoke filled cell snatch rescue drill exercise took place on the 4th August 2003 with four officers fully equipped in the B.A equipment involved. They used three “dummies” persons (and had them located at different locations within the cell). The exercise began at 9.45 a.m and they had the three “dummies” removed to an area of safety by 9.56 a.m which was a reasonably good time for the exercise.
- 7.8 The records show another fire drill exercise took place on the 28th August 2002 in C cell block in which 21 prisoners and five officers were evacuated. This exercise began at 2.13 p.m and was completed at 2.16 p.m which was good time for such an exercise.
- 7.9 No full refresher training in B.A has taken place for staff in 2002 or to date in 2003. However, 70% of the staff have received training in the donning and

doffing of the B. A equipment in 2003. The Inspectorate were informed that shortage of staff and overtime budgetary restrictions was the reason for no full refresher training taking place. This is a matter of concern to the Inspector and recommends that such training should be commenced as soon as possible.

- 7.10 A large number of staff (59) have received refresher training in control and restraint phase one in 2003 while 32 staff have received phase two training in C & R in 2002. Fire drill refresher training takes place on Saturday mornings, when staff are available, and such refresher training includes B.A donning and doffing and C&R.
- 7.11 There are 16 high pressure and 6 low pressure water hydrants located around the prison, as well as fire extinguishers in strategic areas. Life line hose reels are also installed mainly at entrances to the various building blocks, such reels can reach the furthest point of the buildings concerned. There is a 10 bar water pressure on the hydrants which is very acceptable to the fire brigade personnel. There are two water main supply, one for domestic use while the other is for fire/emergency use with a half a million gallon storage tank facility. The hose reels are water filled and when turned on the pressure is then increased by an automatic pump.
- 7.12 There are no water sprinklers or smoke detectors in the cells. There are smoke detectors on the corridor outside of the cells with a vent from the cells to the corridor to allow smoke from the cell out to the corridor. The smoke

detectors are connected to the display panel in the A, B, and C cell blocks. There are smoke extractors, (colt system which also have a fan within them) connected to the smoke detector panel which automatically open when activated. This system is also linked into the loovers in the entrance doorways to the buildings.

7.13 Emergency lighting is fitted throughout the buildings and a battery operated generator is also installed in the event of a power supply failure. There are also push button alarms as well as break glass alarm units fitted throughout the buildings. There are emergency alarm stop buttons installed in the areas required.

7.14 The buildings have emergency exits which are signed and assembly points are also signed in the event of an evacuation. There are no instructions re fire evacuations given to prisoners and perhaps it maybe of benefit if such were given in the information leaflet on committal or in instruction format on the inside of the cell doors. A small number of staff reside at times in the staff accommodation area and they must notify the Assistant Chief Officer on duty when they are in residence. No evacuation fire drill have taken place concerning this particular area and it would be advisable for management to carry out such drills.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Inspector recommends the building of a bridge from the mainland to Spike Island, increase the number of prisoners in Fort Mitchel and develop the facilities needed for such an expansion (9.13, 9.14 Page 48 and 49)
2. Records relating to those placed in special or isolation cells should state the date and time of placement. The date and time of removal. The reason for the placement and who authorised the placement and removal. The records should be initialled by both the Chief Officer and the Governor. The majority of these are already in place (5.2 (b) page 13 and 5.4(a) Page 16)
3. A more suitable location should be found for the serving of prisoners meals in the "C" wing of the prison. (5.3(c), Page 16)
4. That the Prison Service Headquarters look at the possibility of filling the vacant position as soon as possible. (5.6, Page 19)
5. Consideration should be given to serving the main meal to prisoner at 4.30p.m instead of 12.30 p.m on a trial basis (6.8(e), Page 35 and 36)
6. That the laundry facilities be replaced/repaired or alternative arrangements be made with an outside laundry (5.9 Page 21 and 6.8(f) Page 36)
7. That chairs with back support be supplied to each prisoner in his cell (6.8(j)(2), Page 37)

8. That the gym be opened for prisoners use in the afternoons and recreation periods. (6.8(k), Page 37)
9. That full refresher B.A training for staff take place as soon as possible (7.9, Page 41)
10. That an additional Probation and Welfare Officer be appointed (6.5 Page 31 and 9.8 Page 47)

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The inspection of Fort Mitchel on Spike Island was interesting is so far as it is a prison on an island and the only means of entry to it was by boat which the inspectorate team took each morning from Cobh, County Cork.
- 9.2 The buildings are very old but with the refurbishment work carried out the living conditions for the prisoners are quite acceptable with toilet and wash hand basin in almost all of the cells. The fact that there are very little single cell accommodation is a drawback but the younger aged offenders appear to like the company of others to share a cell. The management try and accommodate ones from the same area or city or pals to share the same cell and in this way it avoids friction among them as far as possible.
- 9.3 The prison is relatively free of illegal drugs and I suppose the fact that it is on an islands helps toward keeping it drug free. However, the Inspectorate

team were shown a prisoner's personal clothing that had been sent in for him and within the clothing was concealed illegal drugs. We were also shown other ways in which drugs are attempted to be smuggled into the prison. No prisoner within the prison is on a methadone maintenance programme although there are considerable number of drug addicts among the population. The visits are operated on a strictly no contact basis.

- 9.4 The regime within the prison is very much educational focused with a few prisoner occupied at various work tasks around the prison such as kitchen, mess, gardening, trades, cleaning etc. However not all of the prisoner are occupied throughout the day and the lack of workshops or work/training is evident. The non use of the gym in the p.m's and evening recreation time is another area of concern. The Inspector would like to see all of the prisoners involved in some tasks for the entire period of their unlock.
- 9.5 There are no restrictions on the number of showers a prisoner can have during the week and they are issued with 3 sets of clothing, which they can change weekly. Phones facilities and letters are available to all the prisoners. They can have uncensored contact with the Samaritans and their legal advisors.
- 9.6 There were 52 prisoners placed on disciplinary reports (P.19's) in the past 3 months, 11 of which forfeited remission as a result of the reports and 14 of them forfeited evening recreation for 4 weeks or longer. Three of the reports were for assault on staff while 15 were for assault on other prisoners. One

of the prisoners was on report for attempting to smuggle illegal substance into the prison while nobody was placed on the “screen” visits for the past three months.

- 9.7 The teaching facilities are very good and the number of teachers per head of population appear excellent although if one to one instructions are given it involves a lot of teacher time.
- 9.8 The one probation and welfare officer attached to the prison is reported as being overworked, but there is a new senior appointed who is going to give at least 1 and a half days per week there which will be of great benefit . An additional full time officer is recommended.
- 9.9 There appears to be a good medical service for the prisoners and the medical consultant to the Inspectorate team found the services as good as that in the community. However there were complaints from the prisoners of long waiting time to see the psychiatrist, psychologist and dentist, but this has been denied by the particular professionals themselves and by management.
- 9.10 The staffing levels indicate that the prison operates at 4 posts under their compliment. There are 13 staff seeking a transfer out of the prison while the staff turnover for last year was 10. There were 5 new staff assigned, 4 were transferred and 1 retired. There is an average of between 2 and 3 staff sick per day and none of the staff have been on continuous sick leave for six

months or more. The average total weekly overtime worked by staff is 739 hours while 7 staff do not work any overtime. Staff who were detailed for duty on overtime basis failed to report on 61 occasions since the beginning of 2003 and most of these failures were on Saturdays. No disciplinary hearing took place for any form of misconduct in the past year. No escapes from either the prison, escorts, hospital in patients or temporary release escorts took place in the past year.

- 9.11 A large number of staff have partook of the B.A refresher (donning and doffing) training while no complete refresher training in this area took place. Refresher training in C&R, fire prevention familiarisation and fire drill exercise took place for a considerable number of staff, however some more needs to be done in this area.
- 9.12 Two staff member are pursuing further educational courses to B.A degree level. A total of 84 staff have received training in computer skills for prison related work. The uncertainty regarding the future plans for Fort Mthel is having a morale effect on the staff. Several staff have expressed their concerns and even some of the senior staff are considering transfers, whom prior to the threat of closure would not have considered transferring as they were very happy to work there.
- 9.13 Overall it is a well run prison and with such space and area for further development I would recommend the building of a bridge from the mainland to the island. The present cost of the boat and barge plus the staffs island

allowance could be discontinued and the costs of the bridge would be recouped over a number of years in the savings made in these payments. In order to justify the cost of the bridge the number of prisoners held there would need to be increased dramatically as well as providing far more work and training facilities for them. These facilities are lacking there at present.

- 9.14 It would be sad if this prison with its huge potential for expansion at reasonable expense were to be permanently closed. Prisoners need open spaces particularly when dealing with young people. It is appalling to keep youths in cells for an average of 16 hours per day without adequate recreational facilities. The Governor, staff and all who work here are doing a great job and most acceptable and willing to develop its potential. All it needs is a bridge and the co-operation of the Department of Defence and possibly Cork County Council.