

**MEDIA RELEASE – EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON ON 20<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2012**

**Report No. 76 – Announced Inspection of Banksia Hill Juvenile Detention Centre**

Banksia Hill Juvenile Detention Centre is undergoing fundamental transformation. Currently it houses young males, most of whom have already been sentenced. Female detainees and the majority of male remandees are held at a separate facility, Rangeview Juvenile Remand Centre. Later this year, however, Rangeview will cease to function as a facility for juveniles and will be converted to a privately operated facility for young adult men aged 18 to 24.

Launching his report of an inspection of Banksia Hill Detention Centre, Neil Morgan, the Inspector of Custodial Services, commented:

'Quite soon, Banksia Hill will be the state's only juvenile detention centre, holding all male and female detainees aged between 10 to 17, from every part of the state, and whether sentenced or on remand. Only time will tell whether managing such a diverse group in a single institution in Perth is the best choice, but it certainly presents real opportunities for improvement. These include a more integrated and holistic approach to the management of detainees in general, and a more nurturing and positive environment for young females in particular.'

Compared with the 2008 inspection, this report makes several positive findings with respect to Banksia Hill's operations and 'climate'. In particular, despite the physical and cultural challenges posed by redevelopment, it has maintained a good standard of care to detainees and a pro-social environment.

However, the report also identifies some pressure points. One relates to supply and demand at the remodelled centre. The total number of standard beds will be 210 but Mr Morgan is concerned that some parts of the centre will need to be double bunked to meet demand at peak times:

'During 2011, the number of children in detention exceeded 200 on many occasions, reaching a peak of 227 in April that year. And it is not simply a 'beds vs heads' equation. For example, 36 of the 210 beds are for female detainees only. Our projections indicate that at times, there will be more male detainees than there are male cells.'

These general figures, coupled with the fact that around half of the detainees are not yet sentenced, reinforce the urgency of innovative initiatives to reduce the number of children in detention. These include supervised bail in the metropolitan area and the regional youth justice initiatives being rolled out for the Kimberley, Pilbara, Gascoyne and Goldfields.'

Another pressure point relates to resourcing. Mr Morgan concluded:

'Economies of scale and having juveniles at a single site should bring some financial savings. But it must be accepted that, given the complex needs of the children in question, detention will always be expensive. We found a number of areas where staff

shortages and/or current centre practices were having a negative impact. For example, juveniles are being 'locked down' in their cells or units far more frequently than is the case for adult prisoners. The Department of Corrective Services recognises that lockdowns have a negative impact but states that it has no other option given existing resources and security and safety requirements. In our view, resources should be provided and practices should be embedded to ensure that juvenile facilities are at least brought in line with adult prisons.'

In January 2012, legislation came into effect which gives the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services a new 'audit' function. This provides statutory authority and funding for the Office to examine and report on specific areas of activity over and above its normal inspection activities. Mr Morgan noted that this report includes an example of audit activity:

'We decided to conduct a detailed legal and statistical analysis of the use of different measures to deal with adolescent misbehaviour at the centre. We recognise very well that managing such behaviour is a difficult task because young people in detention are invariably not just offenders but people with complex personal and developmental challenges. These often include victimisation, trauma, substance abuse, mental health issues and educational needs. As such it is necessary to have a range of options, and some flexibility, in responding to misbehaviour.

We found that, quite appropriately, staff usually try to resolve matters at the lowest possible level, rather than escalating them to formal charges or what is called 'regression'. However, we identified some serious matters which need to be addressed. These include lack of clarity and inconsistencies in the governing rules; very poor documentation and record keeping; and inconsistent views amongst staff about how the various options should be used.

We have made numerous findings and recommendations in this area. Most of these have been accepted and supported in full or in part by the Department. At an appropriate future date we will conduct a follow-up audit to examine progress.'

Neil Morgan

19<sup>th</sup> March 2012

Neil Morgan will be available for comment from 12 noon on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> March and can be contacted on 0427 426 471.

The full Report will be available on the Inspector's website ([www.oics.wa.gov.au](http://www.oics.wa.gov.au))