

# Inspector's Overview

KARNET: 'DON'T LET GOOD GET IN THE WAY OF DOING BETTER'

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Karnet Prison Farm (Karnet) is a working prison farm located 80 km south of Perth. It has in recent years had a relatively stable population of just over 300 minimum-security male prisoners.

This inspection followed our usual robust process of inquiry and evidence gathering, including pre-inspection information and data analysis, pre-inspection staff and prisoner surveys, and pre-inspection meetings with senior staff and external service providers. During the on-site part of the inspection we had a diverse team of experienced staff, including two external consultants, who spent a total of seven days at the prison in February 2016. We met with prison management, staff groups, prisoner groups, community representatives, and spent time talking to individual staff members and prisoners throughout the week. The inspection concluded with comprehensive debriefings for staff and prisoners. This field work was complemented by post-inspection analysis of a range of data sets, written information and submissions provided by the prison and the Department and other information gathered during the inspection.

This, our sixth inspection report for Karnet, is based on all of this information. Consistent with our usual practice we have not attributed specific commentary to particular individuals; to do so would, in our view, be unfair and breach the confidentiality under which many staff and prisoners felt free to discuss issues openly and candidly.

Our previous inspection in 2013 concluded on a note of optimism. At that time, despite aging infrastructure, it was expected that Karnet would continue to build on its positive and unique place in the state's prison system. The 2016 inspection examined progress towards this expectation, particularly in how Karnet was living up to its strategic vision to be 'the centre of excellence in pre-release management, by preparing prisoners for reintegration by way of employment, education and training, as well as specialist re-entry support.'

## KARNET 2016

### What we found in 2016 was largely positive

Karnet continued to be a preferred location for prisoners motivated to take the opportunity to improve themselves while in prison. Compared with other prisons Karnet had maintained high participation rates in traineeships and skilled work which is critical to rehabilitation, however, the challenge remains to strive for improvements in the rates of participation. The farm is a significant and successful contributor to food production across the entire prison estate. Staff and prisoners alike are to be commended for their hard work in making this such a success. The Department too deserves credit for its ongoing support of this enterprise.

Education at Karnet was also a success story, although the centre itself is too small to fully service demand. The small but cohesive education team provides a well-planned and structured education program that was responsive to prisoner's needs. There were high levels of engagement by prisoners, particularly Aboriginal prisoners, and feedback from participants was very positive.

We also found that Karnet offered a good range of quality programs that addressed offending needs at varying levels of intensity. Those who had completed a program were very positive about the program, but there were a number of prisoners who were frustrated by delays and scheduling factors that meant they were unable to complete required programs before their earliest date of parole. This does prompt a broader question as to whether there is an opportunity to reduce the overall prison population by ensuring prisoners complete required programs prior to their earliest release date.

There have been a number of improvements to the infrastructure at Karnet since the last inspection; most notable was the upgrade to the medical centre. There have also been upgrades to some of the accommodation blocks but the issue of cell temperatures continues to be a source of complaint from prisoners. Our *Thermal conditions of prison cells* review found that certain cells at Karnet regularly exceeded acceptable temperature ranges, with at least one measured cell reaching dangerous levels of heat (OICS, 2015b, pp. 7-8). These findings justify such complaints, and it is clear that more must be done to address this issue.

Pleasingly there has also been some remedial work completed at the abattoir, which has been assessed by our independent expert as meeting the required industry hygiene and safety standards. But structurally it is limited in its capacity to increase production output to meet future demands of a rising prison population.

General health services are performing well and taking advantage of the new facility. There are opportunities for improvement in the areas of mental health support and dental care (both of which are reoccurring issues of concern across many prisons).

Although the visits centre remains a pleasant, very positive pro-social environment, this was countered to some extent by the disappointing loss of the bus service from Armadale to the prison. The Department stated that the decision was based on a lack of demand, however to counter this loss the Department should proceed with the introduction of e-visits at Karnet.

Karnet, like all prisons, is also facing a number of challenges over both the short and longer term. These include the need to:

- address the strained relationship between senior management and representatives of the WA Prison Officers Union
- address structural disadvantages affecting Aboriginal prisoners, with Noongar men not being represented proportionally across gratuity levels, accommodation, and work sites
- continue to integrate farm planning for Karnet and the state's two other prison farms
- continue the ethos of the prison as prison numbers increase, by maintaining levels of employment, education, and training. (This is a challenge Karnet will face soon as new accommodation blocks were being built at the time this report went to print.)

## THE QUALITY AND TIMELINESS OF THE DEPARTMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT REPORT

A copy of the draft report was provided to the Department in late May 2016 and the Department provided a response in early July. We wrote to the Department shortly after receiving the response seeking further clarification on their responses to four of the recommendations. The aim was to give greater clarity for readers, and to permit a better understanding of the Department's position.

We did not receive a reply until 15 August and the reply did not give the clarification we sought. The final responses [see Appendix 3] added little detail, and some contradicted the original responses.

This protracted process has delayed this report by at least two months, and has affected our ability to meet Parliament's expectations. It has also delayed public acknowledgement of the fine work done by Karnet staff. Unfortunately it is just one example of the problems we currently encounter in obtaining accurate, detailed, and timely information.

## CONCLUSION

We have previously said that Karnet is a good performer and a prison with great potential. That view remains largely unchanged following the 2016 inspection. The prison is generally operating well and has maintained the standards that were evident in 2013. There is always room for improvement and this report contains a number of recommendations which are made with a continuous improvement objective in mind. The prison's vision of being a 'centre of excellence' is realistic and achievable; they are well on the way and it is hoped that Karnet will continue to be supported on this important and productive journey.

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