

MEDIA RELEASE

REPORT NO 131 – 2020 INSPECTION OF BANDYUP WOMEN'S PRISON

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON ON 31 MARCH 2021

The most recent inspection of Bandyup Women's Prison by the Inspector of Custodial Services took place as WA emerged from its Covid-19 lockdown. This made it a very different inspection, but Inspector Eamon Ryan said that the Office's way of doing business meant it was well equipped to manage the unusual circumstances.

Mr Ryan said the continuous inspection model followed by the Office, involving ongoing liaison and monitoring, meant Bandyup could be still be safely and properly inspected.

'While some of our usual practices had to be modified, our knowledge of the prison, regular interaction with the management, staff and prisoners over the past three years and the research and surveys already done meant we could still do our work,' Mr Ryan said.

The opening of the Melaleuca Women's Prison and the Wandoo Rehabilitation Prison to accommodate women had assisted in relieving some population pressure at Bandyup, but many facilities at Bandyup remained aged and inadequate. Mr Ryan said the relief of population pressure was welcome, but many areas of infrastructure still did not meet the needs of women prisoners.

'Despite the best will and desire of the Department, staff and management, much of the service delivery to women at Bandyup is hindered by the limits of its ageing buildings and other facilities.' It was disappointing to find many of our past infrastructure recommendations had gone unaddressed.

A positive development long advocated by the Office was the creation of a new Division within the Department to manage and advocate for the needs of women in the justice system. Mr Ryan said the abandonment of a similar structure years ago had coincided with women's services becoming somewhat lost in the overall rapid rise in prison population.

'We hope the new Division leads to a greater prominence of the needs of women in prison and an improvement in understanding, support and advocacy for services and resources that will better meet their unique needs,' Mr Ryan said.

Unfortunately, this inspection also saw the acute mental health needs of women continue to be a challenge for the prison. This was further complicated by staff conflict at that time within the health portfolio. While staff issues will often exist in workplaces, it had begun to have an unacceptable impact on prisoner services and confidence in mental health services.

After many years of concern about the lack of a dedicated mental health support facility for women prisoners, funding had finally been secured for the conversion of an old

accommodation wing to a dedicated mental health support unit at the prison. Construction commenced after the inspection concluded.

'While not a purpose-built facility, such a unit will provide invaluable support to women suffering acute mental health distress. If it is staffed with appropriate clinicians and operated on a care-based model, it should provide a level of support and care for vulnerable prisoners that is not currently available.' Mr Ryan said.

Now that the majority of staff at Bandyup had undertaken trauma informed care and specific working with women prisoners training, we are hoping to see a significant improvement in the quality of support available to women prisoners.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector

For further media information:

The Inspector, Mr Eamon Ryan, will be available for comment from 12 noon on Wednesday 31 March 2021 and can be contacted on 0421 480 925.