

MEDIA RELEASE

REPORT NO 146 – INSPECTION OF ACACIA PRISON

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12:00PM ON MONDAY 9 JANUARY 2023

Acacia moves beyond contractual uncertainty, but staffing remained a weak link

A long period of contractual uncertainty, and ongoing staffing issues had complicated private operator Serco's management of Western Australia's largest prison – but greater stability since our inspection had seen some gains.

These included improved security and emergency management; better work programs; expanding voluntary and education programs and traineeships; well-utilised automated prisoner information kiosks, and well-run visits and family connection services.

'It's encouraging to see these kinds of services that improve prisoner quality of life and we commend Serco for its work in these areas,' said the Inspector of Custodial Services, Eamon Ryan. 'Links with programs like ReSet that are making resettlement easier are also delivering some good results for prisoners on release.'

However, ongoing and often chronic staffing shortages were affecting Acacia at the time of the inspection; sometimes compromising basic health, education services, training, Aboriginal services and overall prisoner care. Mr Ryan explained:

Acacia faced significant challenges with a period of contractual uncertainty and then the implementation of the new contract's requirements, but the biggest issue we heard about was staffing. It's certainly not alone in this – recruiting staff is a long-term challenge across the whole custodial estate in Western Australia – but perhaps its effects are felt most acutely in a prison of the size of Acacia. Boosting recruitment and training efforts are critical to address a situation that has compromised staff morale and services across the facility. Since the inspection Serco told us that they had run three recruit training schools to bolster staffing numbers.

The progress we saw during the inspection has since been impacted by a major disturbance in February 2022 which resulted in significant infrastructure damage and disruption of services. Mr Ryan said:

Acacia has faced further disruption following the disturbance in February 2022, but through our ongoing liaison work we continue to monitor reconstruction progress and the impacts on services for prisoners.

For further media information:

The Inspector, Mr Eamon Ryan, will be available for comment from 12:00pm on Monday, 9 January 2023 and can be contacted on 0421 480 925.

The full report will be available on the Inspector's website (www.oics.wa.gov.au).