

MEDIA RELEASE

2023 INSPECTION OF BANKSIA HILL DETENTION CENTRE AND UNIT 18 AT CASUARINA PRISON (PART ONE) EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON, 8 JUNE 2023

Section 35 of the *Inspector of Custodial Services Act 2003 (WA)* requires reports by the Inspector of Custodial Services, Mr Eamon Ryan, to be laid before both Houses of Parliament for minimum of 30 days before they can be tabled and publicly released. This timeframe is substantial. Much can occur in 30 days, particularly when it relates to youth custody in Western Australia which is currently experiencing acute crisis.

The report tabled today was laid before both Houses on 8 May 2023, one day prior to the most recent riot at Banksia Hill Detention Centre (9–10 May 2023).

The report outlines the three levels of crisis which were observed by Mr Ryan when he and his team inspected youth custody in early February 2023. It was the first full inspection of Banksia Hill since Mr Ryan's impromptu inspection of the Intensive Support Unit in late 2021. It was also the first inspection since the Department of Justice gazetted Unit 18 at Casuarina Prison to accommodate some of the more challenging young people held in detention. Mr Ryan explained:

Our inspection team included specialist advisers covering education, young people, health and mental health, and cultural safety. And we intended to use our experts' knowledge and advice to examine whether the care being provided to the young people was trauma informed and contemporary. But what we found was an emergency. Every element of Banksia Hill was failing, often through no fault of its own or the efforts of staff. Ultimately, we saw young people, staff and a physical environment in acute crisis.

Site-wide confinement orders were in place at Banksia Hill every day of the 10-day inspection. This meant the young people were locked in cell for excessive lengths of time in order to maintain the good government, good order and security of the centre due to the absence of sufficient staffing. Mr Ryan's report urges the Department to rethink and reimagine the staffing model, detailing how the daily staff shortages were 'unprecedented', that attrition was 'unsustainable', and that recruitment was struggling to 'keep pace'. Mr Ryan said it was clear that what has been tried to date has not worked.

The staff at Banksia Hill and Unit 18 are doing the best job they can in the most difficult of circumstances. Under the current staffing model, the only way to provide safety for young people when there are not enough staff is by being locked in cell. It is a self-perpetuating cycle because the young people's isolation increases their anxieties, anger and frustration and sometimes they act out negatively to themselves and others. When staff respond to these incidents, this often leads to more and longer lockdowns.

The help these young people need and the effective rehabilitation they require are exactly the types of interventions (education, programs, recreation, training, family reconnection and

general health and mental health) that have been most heavily impacted by staffing shortages and increased lockdowns.

Mr Ryan noted that the issues and concerns the team observed during the inspection, meant he has taken an unusual approach to his reporting requirements:

In the public interest of speeding up our reporting, this is an inspection report in two parts. Part One focusses almost entirely on the immediate crises. It proposes 10 practical recommendations and I credit the Department for supporting the majority.

For Part Two, we had hoped to examine the range of rehabilitative supports, interventions and initiatives that we heard about during the inspection. These 'green shoots' were simply inaccessible at the time due to severe staffing shortages. But I am reconsidering the merits of Part Two since the most recent riot.

The events of May 9 and 10 have been an enormous setback for the centre. Much of the work the Department had been trying to do has been undone. And so our planned approach will depend on our close monitoring of the situation in the coming weeks and months. We wait to see what type of daily routine can operate and what level of service delivery is possible, acknowledging that a new school of probationary officers commenced in late-May 2023.

Mr Ryan again called on the State Government to commit to a second youth custodial facility claiming that 'Banksia Hill as the one-size-fits-all approach does not work, and the use of Unit 18 demonstrates the need for a smaller facility for those with complex behavioural needs.' He acknowledged that it would not be an immediate fix to any of the current issues but that it was likely to address the medium to long term needs of youth detention in Western Australia.

For further information:

The Inspector, Mr Ryan, is available for comment from 12pm Thursday 8 June 2023 on 0421 480 925.

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