



Report on an independent review of progress at

HMP Kirkham

by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

28–30 July 2025



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Section 1 Chief Inspector’s summary

- 1.1

HMP Kirkham occupies the site of a former Royal Air Force technical training centre. The facility was taken over by the Home Office in the early 1960s and has been in use as a prison since 1962. Prisoner accommodation was built or rebuilt over the period 1990–2022, but other parts of the prison date back to the 1940s. New accommodation, in the form of temporary modular accommodation, was introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic, and a brick-built unit replacing an older structure opened in 2022.
- 1.2

This review visit followed up on the concerns we raised at our last inspection of HMP Kirkham in 2024.

What we found at our last inspection

- 1.3

At our previous inspections of HMP Kirkham in 2018 and 2024 we made the following judgements about outcomes for prisoners.

Figure 1: HMP Kirkham healthy prison outcomes in 2018 and 2024
Note: rehabilitation and release planning became ‘preparation for release’ in October 2023.



- 1.4

At the last inspection, HMP Kirkham was not fulfilling its purpose as a category D prison. Interventions to reduce the national prison population crisis had disrupted the normal running of the jail and the temporary presumptive recategorisation scheme (TPRS) had led to a large influx of category C prisoners. Many of these prisoners had just a few months left on their sentence, limiting the time available for resettlement work before they were released. This greatly impacted the work of the offender management unit (OMU) and hindered progress for many other prisoners at the jail.
- 1.5

The rate of prisoners testing positive for drug use was the highest in the open estate (25%), with several factors contributing to this problem. Although the provision of education and the range of work opportunities

available in the prison were good, the proportion of prisoners receiving release on temporary licence (ROTL) was lower than in other open jails and too few prisoners could access paid work in the community. There were too few enrichment activities outside of education and work to relieve boredom. Living conditions for many prisoners were poor and relationships between staff and prisoners were not good enough.

- 1.6 Preparation for the release of higher risk prisoners was neither timely nor well organised.

What we found during this review visit

- 1.7 The drug problem at Kirkham had got worse. Leaders had made a concerted effort to improve their strategy, but it was not yet effective. Positive results for mandatory drug tests had risen above 40%.
- 1.8 Relationships between staff and prisoners had improved, but too many prisoners still lived in poor accommodation. Prisoners on the specialist and refurbished units were more positive about staff and living conditions.
- 1.9 Leaders had made reasonable progress in improving access to good-quality work opportunities. They had also worked hard to increase and promote the range of enrichment activities available to prisoners, and gym provision was greatly improved.
- 1.10 The churn of prisoners arriving at and leaving Kirkham had increased and more than three-quarters were at the jail for less than six months. This made it difficult for leaders to cultivate a positive category D ethos. Despite this, public protection measures and ROTL processes had improved.

Charlie Taylor

HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

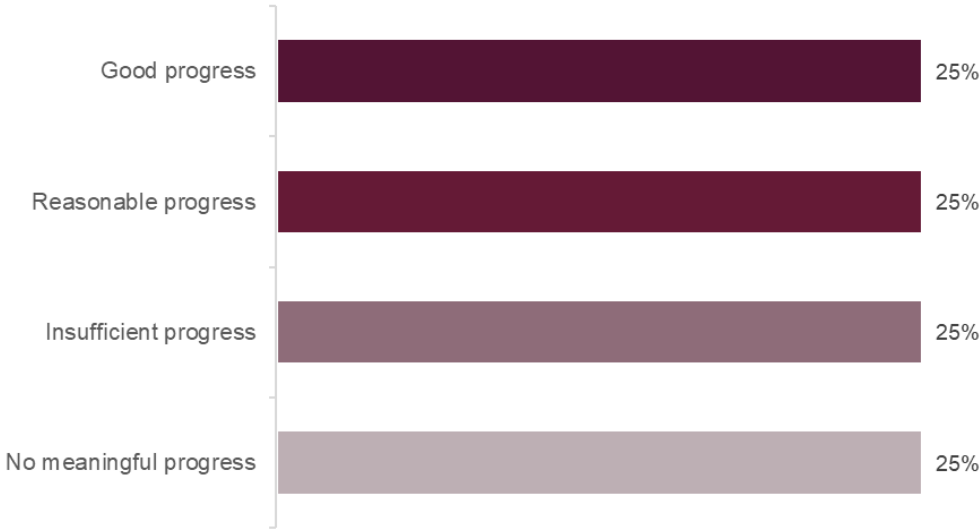
August 2025

Section 2 Key findings

- 2.1 At this independent review of progress (IRP) visit, we followed up eight concerns and Ofsted followed up one theme from our most recent inspection in September 2024.
- 2.2 HMI Prisons judged that the prison had made good progress in two concerns, reasonable progress in two concerns, insufficient progress in two concerns and no meaningful progress in two concerns.

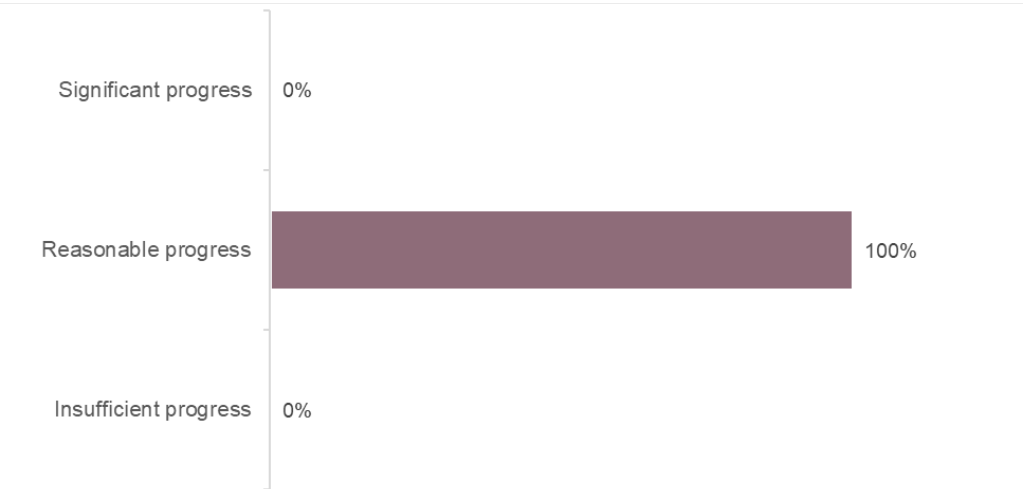
Figure 2: Progress on HMI Prisons concerns from September 2024 inspection (n=8)

This bar chart excludes any concerns that were followed up as part of a theme within Ofsted’s concurrent prison monitoring visit.



- 2.3 Ofsted judged that the prison had made reasonable progress in one theme.

Figure 3: Progress on Ofsted themes from September 2024 inspection (n=1).



Notable positive practice

2.4 We define notable positive practice as:

Evidence of our expectations being met to deliver particularly good outcomes for prisoners, and/or particularly original or creative approaches to problem-solving.

2.5 Inspectors found three examples of notable positive practice during this IRP visit, which other prisons may be able to learn from or replicate. Unless otherwise specified, these examples are not formally evaluated, are a snapshot in time and may not be suitable for other establishments. They show some of the ways our expectations might be met, but are by no means the only way.

Examples of notable positive practice

a)	Leaders had introduced several good-quality enrichment activities that prisoners could participate in while on ROTL, including cycling and beach cleaning.	See paragraph 3.26
b)	Leaders had established an effective multidisciplinary employment hub that supported prisoners on ROTL and on release. This included help with completing job applications and communicating with employers.	See paragraph 3.33
c)	Two prison offender managers (POMs) had been designated as public protection single points of contact, who supported their colleagues to improve the quality and consistency of assessments and decision-making.	See paragraph 3.53

Section 3 Progress against our concerns and Ofsted themes

The following provides a brief description of our findings in relation to each concern followed up from the full inspection in 2024.

Security

Concern: Illicit drugs were far too freely available.

- 3.1 Leaders had taken important steps to improve their strategy to reduce the prevalence of drugs at HMP Kirkham. However, this work was in its infancy and was yet to have an impact; the proportion of random mandatory drug tests that were positive for illicit substances had increased since the last inspection, to an average of 34% over the past six months, with recent monthly results of well over 40%.
- 3.2 Leaders had recently launched a comprehensive and wide-ranging strategy and action plan to tackle substance misuse, informed by consultation with Public Health England. This was supported by the launch of a promising new monthly multidisciplinary meeting, covering safety, security and the drug strategy.
- 3.3 Shortly before our visit, a custodial manager post had been created to oversee the drug strategy. While other prisons with significant drug problems were funded for an additional drug strategy lead, at HMP Kirkham this role was funded from the governor's budget, which took resource from other areas.
- 3.4 A Recovery Focused Living billet opened in April 2025, where prisoners underwent voluntary drug tests and were provided with additional incentives to remain drug free.
- 3.5 All prisoners were now tested on arrival at the prison, which prompted support from the substance misuse service at the earliest opportunity. However, the levels of substance misuse evident called into question whether every new arrival was appropriately allocated to this open prison.
- 3.6 Leaders had introduced some creative new enrichment activities for prisoners to reduce substance misuse linked to boredom (see paragraphs 3.24 to 3.31).
- 3.7 We considered that the prison had made insufficient progress in this area.

Concern: The absence of telephones in prisoners' rooms encouraged the use of illicit mobile phones. This affected the security of the prison and the ability of the offender management unit to monitor calls and identify risk.

- 3.8 There were still no in-cell telephones, and only one PIN phone per billet. This meant that prisoners' ability to maintain regular and private contact with their families was still severely restricted.
- 3.9 Two billets now had screens around the communal phone to improve privacy.



Phone booth under construction

- 3.10 Despite the efforts of local and regional leaders, HM Prison and Probation Service had still not approved handheld PIN-enabled mobile phones or fitted in-cell telephones.
- 3.11 We considered that the prison had made no meaningful progress in this area.

Staff-prisoner relationships

Concern: Staff-prisoner relationships were poor and prisoners' perception of how they were treated was overwhelmingly negative.

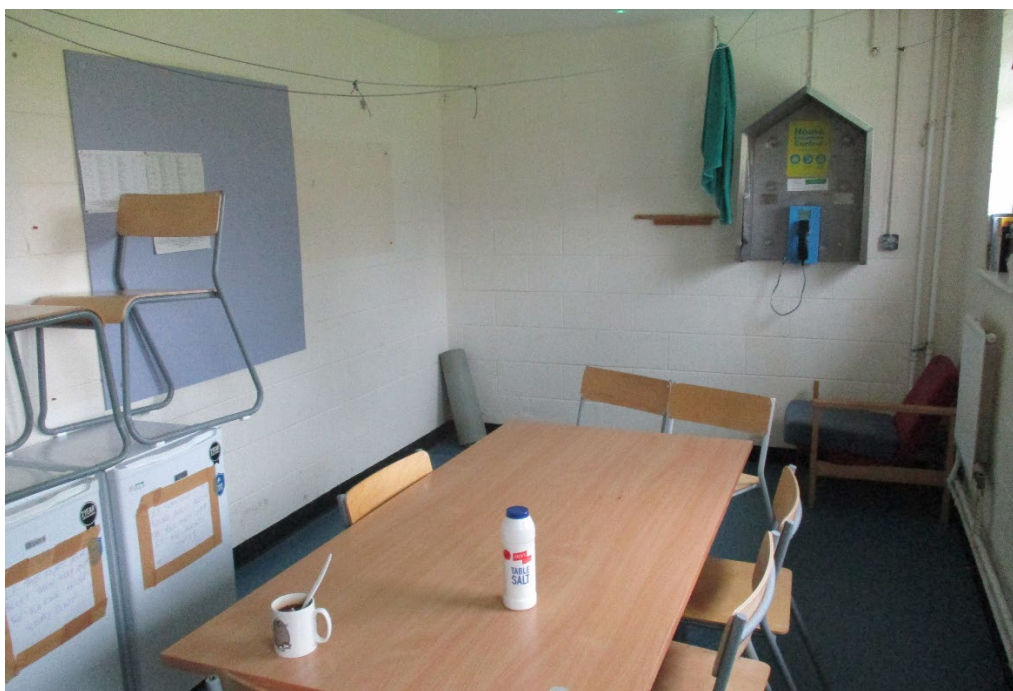
- 3.12 Leaders had taken our concerns about the negative culture seriously. Consultation events had been held with both staff and prisoners, led by a custodial manager appointed to oversee and enact cultural change.

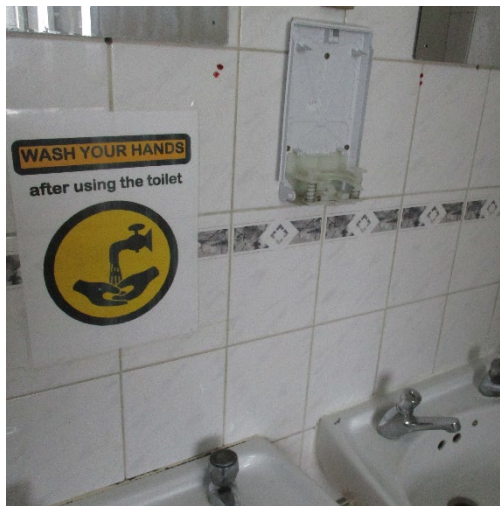
- 3.13 Two new residential supervising officer posts had been created. Part of their remit was to upskill newer staff through role modelling and enforcing standards. Despite the potential value of these roles in driving improvement, they were not permanently funded.
- 3.14 Some prisoners reported improvements in staff-prisoner relationships. Most of those who lived on refurbished and specialist units told us they had positive experiences with staff, who were friendly and approachable.
- 3.15 However, we still saw very few interactions between staff and prisoners on other billets. Staff still didn't provide sufficient oversight of living conditions to improve standards of hygiene and cleanliness.
- 3.16 Leaders had credible plans to introduce a support officer role in the coming months. This would ensure that prisoners had a named officer they could approach with queries and with whom they could develop a positive relationship.
- 3.17 Several joint recreational activities had been held, which enabled staff and prisoners to build more positive relationships.
- 3.18 We considered that the prison had made reasonable progress in this area.

Living conditions

Concern: Living conditions were not good enough and many of the billets needed refurbishment, particularly of the shower facilities.

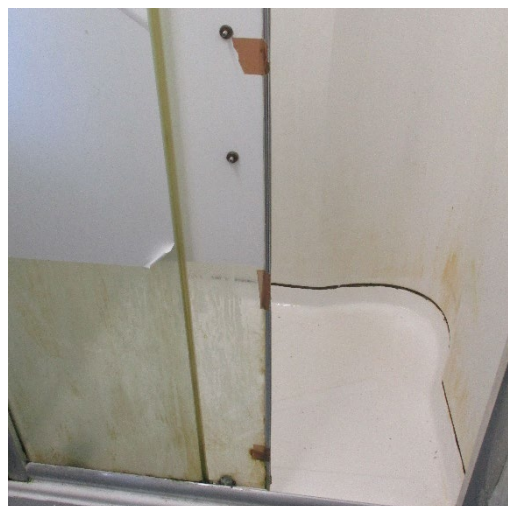
- 3.19 Living conditions for many prisoners were still not good enough. Most billets were shabby and in need of maintenance.





Association room on E billet (top), lack of soap in bathroom (bottom left) and broken light switch on residential unit (bottom right)

- 3.20 A programme to fully refurbish all residential accommodation had started in May 2025, and was to run for two and a half years. However, with only one billet completed and one in progress at the time of our visit, progress was too slow.



Shower on the refurbished billet (left) and shower on the non-refurbished billet

- 3.21 Prisoner working parties continued to undertake small repairs and decorative improvements. Sadly, some showers that were newly refurbished at the time of the inspection were already mouldy due to poor ventilation.
- 3.22 Two new and much-needed residential supervising officer posts had been created very shortly before our visit. These were slowly starting to drive up standards of cleanliness and hygiene on the units.
- 3.23 We considered that the prison had made insufficient progress in this area.

Time out of cell

Concern: There was too little enrichment activity available to occupy prisoners' time, and the gym was underused.

- 3.24 Shortly after the inspection a small group of leaders and managers formed a 'Boredom Busters' working group to improve the enrichment activities available to prisoners.
- 3.25 Leaders had consulted with staff and prisoners, which had led to a range of options being considered and developed. By the end of 2024, a busy schedule of activities was on offer. The programme was further refined in subsequent months and promoted across the site. Activities included competitions, film nights, and debating clubs.



Notice board advertising enrichment activity and OMU clinics

- 3.26 In addition to activities on site, leaders had introduced several community activities that prisoners could participate in when they were released on temporary licence, including cycling and beach cleaning. The latter was particularly popular and prisoners who had taken part expressed satisfaction at being able to do something positive for the

community. All ROTL plans now included a section on enrichment activity to encourage prisoners to participate.

- 3.27 Many of the activities involved staff and prisoners participating together, such as nature walks, which helped to break down barriers and improve relationships (see paragraphs 3.12 to 3.17).
- 3.28 Since the inspection, leaders had appointed an enthusiastic and effective PE manager, who had introduced an extensive programme of activities and increased prisoner participation.
- 3.29 The programme had been extended and was now delivered in the evenings and at weekends. Risk assessments had been carried out for the weights area, and as a result the number of prisoners who could participate had increased to 35 per session, with plans to increase this further. The weights room and sports hall were now open simultaneously, and the outdoor sports field was now used regularly.
- 3.30 The PE department had recently gained accreditation as an awarding body and there were credible plans to start offering a range of courses to prisoners.



Weights room

- 3.31 Despite all the improvements made in this area, the reduction in the number of prisoners accessing ROTL (see paragraph 3.37) meant there were more prisoners on site and not enough enrichment activities to occupy everyone at the weekend.
- 3.32 We considered that the prison had made good progress in this area.

Education, skills and work



This part of the report is written by Ofsted inspectors. Ofsted's thematic approach reflects the monitoring visit methodology used for further education and skills providers. The themes set out the main areas for improvement in the prison's previous inspection report or progress monitoring visit letter.

Theme 1: Too many prisoners could not access good-quality employment, voluntary work or education in the community. Leaders and managers had not enabled enough prisoners to gain this valuable experience, to help prepare them for employment after release.

- 3.33 Since the previous inspection, leaders had restructured the employment hub and had brought Custody to Work and careers support for prisoners into this department. Staff had been given specific job roles with a responsibility to prepare prisoners for outworking and to liaise directly with employers. Managers had established effective collaboration with the OMU, which had enabled prisoners to get into outworking more quickly than was previously the case. As a result, the proportion of eligible prisoners accessing outworking had started to rise and the proportion who had entered sustainable employment on release had increased over recent months. Prisoners said that they received helpful support from employment hub staff to find employment. However, many prisoners continued to express their concern over the time taken to process their applications for ROTL.
- 3.34 Managers in education, skills and work had reviewed the curriculum, taking into consideration the short length of stay for most prisoners. The new curriculum to be implemented in the autumn would focus on the development of prisoners' employability skills and planning for their release. Managers had started to develop relevant employment pathways based on the work and industries provided in the prison, and had begun to link these with employers offering outworking opportunities. Managers rightly recognised that the pathways needed to be fully established and operational in order to have a significant impact on improving prisoners' readiness for employment.
- 3.35 Managers had increased the number and range of employment opportunities prisoners could access as part of ROTL. Employment opportunities were well regarded by prisoners and provided them with valuable opportunities to develop their skills and to prepare them for release. Prisoners could gain skills in areas such as heavy goods vehicle driving, logistics, customer service and telecommunications. Employers spoke highly of the work attitudes and behaviours of their employees and volunteers from HMP Kirkham. Most employers said they would offer permanent positions to prisoners on release.

- 3.36 Ofsted considered that the prison had made reasonable progress against this theme.

Reducing reoffending

Concern: A variety of strategies to manage overcrowding across the prison estate, including the temporary presumptive recategorisation, end of custody supervised licence and standard determinate sentence 40 schemes, had undermined the ethos and purpose of Kirkham as an open prison. The prison had received far too many short-staying prisoners who were unprepared for open conditions, and its performance in delivering release on temporary licence (ROTL) was worse than for most comparators.

- 3.37 The number of prisoners accessing ROTL had reduced over the previous year, but so too had the number of prisoners who were eligible for this during their stay.
- 3.38 The churn of prisoners arriving at and leaving the prison had continued to increase since the inspection. In the previous year, HMP Kirkham had received almost a quarter of all temporary presumptive recategorisation scheme (TPRS; see Glossary) transfers, despite being one of 13 open prisons. It had also released far more prisoners on home detention curfew than any other open prison.
- 3.39 At the time of the visit, 77% of prisoners had spent less than six months at the prison compared to 51% at the last inspection. Many prisoners were released before the process for ROTL could be completed, which undermined HMP Kirkham's purpose as a category D prison.
- 3.40 The prison had not yet put in place measures to target and support prisoners whose attitude and behaviour suggested they were not ready for category D conditions or those who felt despondent because they had insufficient time to access ROTL before release.
- 3.41 Staff had recently visited several closed prisons to promote the benefits of HMP Kirkham and encourage prisoners with more time to serve to apply for a transfer. However, leaders had very little influence on the high number of prisoners who arrived with too little time left for the prison to support their progression and rehabilitation.
- 3.42 We considered that the prison had made no meaningful progress in this area.

Concern: Arrangements for ROTL were weak. Processes were cumbersome, approvals were late and the department which organised work placements was under-resourced

- 3.43 Arrangements for ROTL had improved, although the process continued to be frustrating for prisoners, who felt they waited too long to access this.
- 3.44 The prison had invested in an additional manager in the OMU to make the process more efficient. The average time to complete boards once all internal and external checks had been completed had recently improved, from 39 days in June 2024 to seven days in June 2025.
- 3.45 Much of the ROTL process had been digitised to reduce bureaucracy and improve timeliness. Authorisations could now be transferred between managers and signed electronically. The prison had also implemented a robust ROTL tracking system. This included target dates to prompt external partners, such as the police and probation services, to complete the checks allocated to them and escalate undue delays to managers in the community. Leaders regularly scrutinised the data on ROTL performance to identify areas for improvement.
- 3.46 The changes to the process meant that ROTL booklets could now be delivered complete to prisoners without the need to sign individual licences at the weekly ROTL clinic, which had previously been the case. Consequently, this forum could now be used by prisoners to speak to a POM about the progress of their application.
- 3.47 The prison had also recently introduced a monthly OMU managers forum, which gave prisoners a further opportunity to discuss the ROTL process.
- 3.48 The number of complaints about ROTL had reduced over the previous six months from 53 between November 2024 and February 2025 to 26 in the following four months.
- 3.49 The coordination of work between the OMU and the employment team, known as Custody to Work (C2W), had also improved (see paragraph 3.33). Prison offender managers met weekly with the C2W team to ensure that ROTL applications considered safeguarding measures as well as a prisoner's employment skills and available jobs.
- 3.50 We considered that the prison had made good progress in this area.

Public protection

Concern: Public protection arrangements were weak. There was no routine oversight of risk management plans for high-risk prisoners approaching release. These prisoners were not invited to ROTL boards and too few had their compliance tested on temporary licence.

- 3.51 Since the inspection two new senior probation officers (SPOs) had been appointed and had introduced several changes to improve the management of public protection risks.
- 3.52 The SPOs were keen to ensure continuous improvement. They responded positively to our feedback during the visit, putting in place measures to minimise potential weaknesses in some processes. They had also visited another open prison in the region to identify areas of good practice that could be replicated. Following this, they had introduced a public protection database that was accessible to all staff who needed to know about these risks, such as the security department.
- 3.53 In March 2025, two POMs had been designated as public protection single points of contact. They had a reduced caseload of prisoners compared to other POMs in the OMU. Fifty per cent of their time was 'ring-fenced' for public protection work and to provide support with screening the risk presented by all new arrivals. The single points of contact had developed as subject matter experts, who were available to support their colleagues to improve the consistency and quality of assessments and decision-making.
- 3.54 Face-to-face ROTL boards had recently been introduced for high-risk prisoners. This enabled prison managers to explore the risks posed by the prisoners before they went into the community.
- 3.55 While the scope of the monthly risk management meeting had been expanded, it still did not systematically consider the release plans for all those who presented a public protection risk.
- 3.56 It was concerning that a full offender assessment (OASys) was not a prerequisite for TPRS prisoners moving to the open estate. We saw examples of prisoners who had arrived with very little time left to serve and risks that had not been identified or assessed by the sending prison. This left staff at HMP Kirkham with little time to address risks before the prisoners were released.
- 3.57 We considered that the prison had made reasonable progress in this area.

Section 4 Summary of judgements

A list of the HMI Prisons concerns and Ofsted themes followed up at this visit and the judgements made.

HMI Prisons concerns

Illicit drugs were far too freely available.

Insufficient progress.

The absence of telephones in prisoners' rooms encouraged the use of illicit mobile phones. This affected the security of the prison and the ability of the offender management unit to monitor calls and identify risk.

No meaningful progress.

Staff-prisoner relationships were poor and prisoners' perception of how they were treated was overwhelmingly negative.

Reasonable progress.

Living conditions were not good enough and many of the billets needed refurbishment, particularly of the shower facilities.

Insufficient progress.

There was too little enrichment activity available to occupy prisoners' time, and the gym was underused.

Good progress.

A variety of strategies to manage overcrowding across the prison estate, including the temporary presumptive recategorisation, end of custody supervised licence and standard determinate sentence 40 schemes, had undermined the ethos and purpose of Kirkham as an open prison. The prison had received far too many short-staying prisoners who were unprepared for open conditions, and its performance in delivering release on temporary licence (ROTL) was worse than for most comparators.

No meaningful progress.

Arrangements for ROTL were weak. Processes were cumbersome, approvals were late and the department which organised work placements was under-resourced.

Good progress.

Public protection arrangements were weak. There was no routine oversight of risk management plans for high-risk prisoners approaching release. These prisoners were not invited to ROTL boards and too few had their compliance tested on temporary licence.

Reasonable progress.

Ofsted theme

Too many prisoners could not access good-quality employment, voluntary work or education in the community. Leaders and managers had not enabled enough prisoners to gain this valuable experience, to help prepare them for employment after release.

Reasonable progress

Appendix I About this report

HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMI Prisons) is an independent, statutory organisation which reports on the treatment and conditions of those detained in prisons, young offender institutions, secure training centres, immigration detention facilities, court custody and military detention.

All visits carried out by HM Inspectorate of Prisons contribute to the UK's response to its international obligations under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). OPCAT requires that all places of detention are visited regularly by independent bodies – known as the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) – which monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees. HM Inspectorate of Prisons is one of several bodies making up the NPM in the UK.

Independent reviews of progress (IRPs) are designed to improve accountability to ministers about the progress prisons make in addressing HM Inspectorate of Prisons' concerns in between inspections. IRPs take place at the discretion of the Chief Inspector when a full inspection suggests the prison would benefit from additional scrutiny and focus on a limited number of the concerns raised at the inspection. IRPs do not therefore result in assessments against our healthy prison tests. HM Inspectorate of Prisons' healthy prison tests are safety, respect, purposeful activity and rehabilitation and release planning. For more information see our website: [Expectations – HM Inspectorate of Prisons \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)

The aims of IRPs are to:

- assess progress against selected priority and key concerns
- support improvement
- identify any emerging difficulties or lack of progress at an early stage
- assess the sufficiency of the leadership and management response to our concerns at the full inspection.

This report contains a summary from the Chief Inspector and a brief record of our findings in relation to each concern we have followed up. The reader may find it helpful to refer to the report of the full inspection, carried out in [MONTH, YEAR] for further detail on the original findings (available on our website at [Our reports – HM Inspectorate of Prisons \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)).

IRP methodology

IRPs are announced at least three months in advance and take place eight to 12 months after a full inspection. When we announce an IRP, we identify which concerns we intend to follow up (usually no more than 15). Depending on the concerns to be followed up, IRP visits may be conducted jointly with Ofsted (England), Estyn (Wales), the Care Quality Commission and the General Pharmaceutical Council. This joint work ensures expert knowledge is deployed and avoids multiple inspection visits.

During our three-day visit, we collect a range of evidence about the progress in implementing each selected concern. Sources of evidence include observation, discussions with prisoners, staff and relevant third parties, documentation and data.

Each concern followed up by HMI Prisons during an IRP is given one of four progress judgements:

No meaningful progress

Leaders had not yet formulated, resourced or begun to implement a realistic improvement plan to address this concern.

Insufficient progress

Leaders had begun to implement a realistic improvement strategy (for example, with better and embedded systems and processes), but prisoner outcomes were improving too slowly or had not improved at all.

Reasonable progress

Leaders were implementing a realistic improvement strategy, with evidence of sustainable progress and some early improvement in outcomes for prisoners.

Good progress

Leaders had already implemented a realistic improvement strategy to address this concern and had delivered a clear improvement in outcomes for prisoners.

When Ofsted attends an IRP its methodology replicates the monitoring visits conducted in further education and skills provision. Each theme followed up by Ofsted is given one of three progress judgements.

Insufficient progress

Progress has been either slow or insubstantial or both, and the demonstrable impact on learners has been negligible.

Reasonable progress

Action taken by the provider is already having a beneficial impact on learners and improvements are sustainable and are based on the provider's thorough quality assurance procedures.

Significant progress

Progress has been rapid and is already having considerable beneficial impact on learners.

Ofsted's approach to undertaking monitoring visits and the inspection methodology involved are set out in the *Further education and skills inspection handbook*, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework>.

Inspection team

This independent review of progress was carried out by:

Martin Lomas	Deputy Chief Inspector
Deborah Butler	Team leader
Lindsay Jones	Inspector
David Owens	Inspector
Jonny Wright	Ofsted inspector
Malcolm Bruce	Ofsted inspector

Appendix II Glossary

We try to make our reports as clear as possible, and this short glossary should help to explain some of the specialist terms you may find.

Care Quality Commission (CQC)

CQC is the independent regulator of health and adult social care in England. It monitors, inspects and regulates services to make sure they meet fundamental standards of quality and safety. For information on CQC's standards of care and the action it takes to improve services, please visit: <http://www.cqc.org.uk>

End of custody supervised licence (ECSL)

A scheme intended to tackle overcrowding, which entails prisoners being released up to 70 days early and having their supervised licence in the community extended. Restrictions apply for certain categories of offences. ECSL started in October 2023 and ended in September 2024 (see SDS40).

Leader

In this report the term 'leader' refers to anyone with leadership or management responsibility in the prison system. We will direct our narrative at the level of leadership which has the most capacity to influence a particular outcome.

SDS40

A scheme intended to tackle overcrowding where prisoners serving a standard determinate sentence only spend 40% of their sentence in prison instead of 50% and their time on probation in the community is extended. Restrictions apply for certain categories of offences. SDS40 replaces ECSL and releases commenced in September 2024.

Temporary presumptive recategorisation scheme (TPRS)

A scheme intended to tackle overcrowding, which requires governors to fast-track prisoners to open establishments without the usual restrictions. Restrictions apply for certain categories of offences. TPRS was introduced in March 2023.

Time out of cell

Time out of cell, in addition to formal 'purposeful activity', includes any time prisoners are out of their cells to associate or use communal facilities to take showers or make telephone calls.

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