

KARNET PRISON FARM – KEY FINDINGS

Karnet Prison Farm continues to be a desirable placement for prisoners who are motivated to pursue education, vocational training, and meaningful employment during their incarceration. In the context of the Western Australian custodial estate, the prison has high participation rates in traineeships and skilled work. While a positive and consistent performer, we found that these areas had not progressed or improved greatly since the last inspection, and there is still room to do more, with targeted resources

Prisoners value the relative freedom that Karnet affords, and we found that areas and services that impact on day to day quality of life for prisoners are functioning well, including good reception and orientation processes, an engaged peer support team, good access to active and passive recreation, the quality of the food and the general feeling of safety. The self-care accommodation units at Karnet are a genuine incentive for good behaviour.

The temperatures in prisoner accommodation units at Karnet during the summer-time inspection however were very hot and uncomfortable. Not surprisingly, this was an issue of significant complaint by prisoners, as it had been in previous years.

The visits centre at Karnet is a positive, pro-social environment. Facilities for, and treatment of, visitors was positive, which contributes towards the successful reintegration of prisoners into their communities of families and friends. Visitors who do not have access to private transport however are disadvantaged, due to Karnet's location. The cancellation of a bus service from Armadale train station, together with the absence of any e-visit options such as Skype, is unsatisfactory, given the importance of prisoners having social visits with their friends and family.

Some training and employment opportunities for prisoners at Karnet were extremely conducive towards community reintegration, for example the excellent Fairbridge Binjareb Project for Aboriginal prisoners, and the quality of work being carried out by Karnet prisoners approved to work outside the prison in the community. Unfortunately, not enough prisoners were accessing this external work, and approval processes appeared to have had a drag effect on participation since the previous inspection.

The long-awaited refurbishment of the Health Centre had been completed since the last inspection, and presented as a good facility which is fit for purpose. Health services were found to be adequate, although some gaps in service provision were detected in the areas of mental health support, dental care, and Aboriginal focused re-entry health support.

The Department has established a good programs facility at Karnet, although there were still some issues that needed attention. Karnet was delivering quite a diverse range of offender programs addressing a number of particular offending needs at various levels of intensity. Those who had completed offender programs were positive about what it meant for them. However a significant minority were frustrated by delays and scheduling factors that resulted in a failure to complete required programs before their earliest eligibility date for parole. This was a persistent issue from the previous inspection.

Resettlement services at Karnet were generally working well, and Karnet also effectively administered release and resocialisation programs for prisoners held on life sentences, and other complex cases.

Karnet's primary production activities continue to play a crucial role in feeding the prison population of Western Australia. These areas also continue to be key training and employment opportunities for prisoners. Considering the ever increasing prison population, to levels not seen previously, the Department will need to make crucial decisions regarding strategic investment in food production capacity across all prison farms.

Communication between custodial staff and management had been strained in 2015, evidence by a high number of industrial disputes. We found that while prison staff at Karnet appeared to have generally good relationships with prisoners there was considerable room to improve overall communication with prisoners, particularly on structural or policy matters.