

Inspector's Overview

BANDYUP BENEFITS FROM STABLE LEADERSHIP AND INCREASED PROMINENCE OF THE WOMEN'S ESTATE

Our inspection of Bandyup Women's Prison (Bandyup) took place as Western Australia was starting to emerge from Phase 3 COVID-19 restrictions. We modified our inspection approach to minimise risks and accommodate social distancing requirements, but in the end the inspection was not impeded in any material way, except perhaps by way of timeframes.

Women in prison have traditionally made up a small, but increasing, percentage of the overall prison population. Historically, the Department's focus has largely been on addressing the needs of men in prison, whether that be by way of infrastructure spending or the allocation of other resources. At the time of our last inspection in 2017 things had started to change and the women's estate has continued to receive more attention. The capacity pressure on Bandyup has been relieved to a large extent by the opening of the Wandoo Rehabilitation Prison in July 2018, which complemented the opening of the Melaleuca Remand and Reintegration Facility in December 2016. More recently Melaleuca has been returned to public operation as a remand facility which opens opportunities for better integration across the women's estate.

The Department has created a separate Women and Young People Division under the leadership of an experienced Deputy Commissioner. The Department is also undertaking several strategic reviews, as part of its reform agenda, which will have an impact on the women's estate and the role Bandyup is likely to play in the future. Specifically, in response to our recommendation regarding infrastructure limitations at Bandyup, we were told that some areas of concern had been included in the Custodial Infrastructure Plan 2021-2023 and more may be considered on completion of the Prison Services Evaluation under the Network Design Project. These developments will be keenly monitored as part of our ongoing oversight of Bandyup.

Leadership stability has also returned to Bandyup and we were encouraged by the existence of a vision for the future outlined in a solid business plan.

Health services, including mental health, have been the subject of much scrutiny at Bandyup in recent reports by this Office. This inspection again highlighted issues of concern around health services, including evidence of ongoing conflict between certain primary health and mental health staff. We understand that these issues are being addressed but they cannot be allowed to impact on the provision of holistic health care for the women at Bandyup.

One area of concern that we have raised in several reports has been the lack of a dedicated mental health unit at Bandyup. It is well documented that the State's only forensic mental health facility, the Frankland Centre, cannot cope with demand and often prisoners who require admission simply cannot get a bed allocation. During the inspection we were informed that a business case had been submitted to refurbish Unit 1 A Wing as a specialist mental health unit. This business case was approved and funded in the State Budget and we understand that construction has commenced.

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This is a welcome and commendable initiative which will have a significant impact on the welfare of many women who are sent to Bandyup.

Another pleasing development since our last report was that 80 per cent of staff had undertaken training in trauma informed practice and 75 per cent of staff had undertaken the Department's working with women training. Both initiatives were implemented following our recommendation in 2018 around the need for improvements in staff culture.

Bandyup is a complex prison housing a wide diversity of women; many of whom have challenging behaviours, disability, addictions, or mental health issues. There are pregnant women, mothers and their babies, elderly and infirm. There is also a large cohort of settled sentenced prisoners who are serving long terms of imprisonment. The prison must meet the needs of all these different groups and that challenge ought not be underestimated.

Many of the women at Bandyup are also mothers, grandmothers, and aunts who play significant roles of influence on the next generation in their families. If the prison system supports and assists these women in their rehabilitation and in turning their lives around, then that work will have a significant impact on the next generation. An investment in the women held in prison today will pay dividends to the next generation of young people. The narrative and recommendations in this report are best read with this in mind.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Bandyup has three very experienced Independent Prison Visitors who are community volunteers appointed by the Minister for Corrective Services. They attend the prison on a regular basis providing an opportunity for the prisoners to raise issues and feedback that information to our office. I acknowledge the importance of their work and thank them for the contribution they make to our ongoing monitoring of Bandyup.

It is important to also acknowledge the support and cooperation we received throughout the inspection from the Superintendent and staff at Bandyup and from key personnel in the Department. The women who took the time to speak with us and share their perspective also deserve our acknowledgment and thanks.

We had two expert consultants involved in this inspection, Dr Jocelyn Jones from UWA and Ms Shirley Parer from the Department of Education. I am very grateful for their expertise and significant contribution to our inspection and to this report.

Finally, I would also like to thank the members of the inspection team for their expertise and hard work throughout the inspection. I would particularly acknowledge the work of Cliff Holdom for his hard work in planning this inspection and as principal drafter of this report.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector

10 December 2020