

MEDIA RELEASE

20 OCTOBER 2026

2026 Inspection of Melaleuca Women's Prison

The Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services has tabled its latest inspection report on Melaleuca Women's Prison, finding a prison under significant and sustained pressure while caring for an increasingly vulnerable population. Chronic staffing shortages, workforce inexperience and population pressures affected almost every aspect of prison life.

The prison was included in a Show Cause Notice published in June 2026, shortly before the on-site inspection was undertaken. The notice reflected the seriousness of ongoing risks at the facility, particularly in the context of chronic staff shortages, frequent lockdowns, and limited access to a normal daily routine.

Feelings of safety by both prisoners and staff had decreased since the previous inspection in 2023, with women experiencing frequent and extended lockdowns and adaptive routines. Health, mental health and dental services were stretched, and conditions did not adequately meet the needs of women in crisis or those who were pregnant.

Despite these pressures, reception and court processes were well managed, legal access was prioritised and staff worked proactively to support timely release. Education and voluntary programs were relevant to the needs of the population and education was appropriately focused on practical skills and employability.

The findings of this inspection reinforce the conclusion that sustained workforce shortages and increasing demand are placing significant strain on the system's ability to provide safe, humane and rehabilitative custody.

Lines attributable to the Acting Inspector of Custodial Services, Ms Jane Higgins:

"Melaleuca is operating under sustained pressure, with workforce shortages and unsuitable infrastructure affecting the daily lives of women and the staff responsible for their care."

"Women entering Melaleuca often have complex health and family needs, and they should be accommodated in an environment that supports safe, humane and trauma-informed custody."

"A fit-for-purpose women's remand facility, supported by a stable and experienced workforce, would provide the foundation for lasting improvement."

Jane Higgins
Acting Inspector of Custodial Services

For further media information: The Acting Inspector, Ms Jane Higgins, will be available for additional written comment from 1pm Tuesday 20 October 2026 via media@oics.wa.gov.au
The full report will be available on the Office's website: www.oics.wa.gov.au