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OPCAT COVID-19 report

Report on inspections of prisons under the Crimes of Torture Act 1989

June 2020

Ombudsman
Tuia kia ōrite • Fairness for all

Office of the Ombudsman
Tari o te Kaitiaki Mana Tangata



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Staff wellbeing

Overall, prison managers displayed an understanding of the issues facing staff during the COVID-19 pandemic, both at home and at work. Inspectors found them supportive of staff and their home circumstances. A number of staff were unable to work due to the complexities of maintaining their personal 'bubbles', or for health reasons. Some prison managers also offered practical support, such as free meals. Some prison staff told my Team about the high level of team spirit over recent weeks; their managers had taken steps to boost staff morale, such as providing morning teas.

All staff my Teams spoke with said the prison they worked in had robust procedures in place to ensure the health and safety of staff and prisoners. They had received good communication from management, and had a good understanding of the prison's expectations during Alert Levels 4 and 3. Generally, staff reported they had received appropriate training, access to PPE, and felt confident in the overall health and safety processes.

All of the staff my Teams spoke with said they felt safe and supported throughout Alert Levels 4 and 3.

Summary of recommendations

I made recommendations for improving the conditions and treatment of prisoners in relation to seven prisons.

I recommended that:

- All prisoners are able to spend at least one hour each day in the fresh air (four prisons).
- All prisoners have access to cleaning materials (two prisons).
- All prisoners have access to hand washing facilities and products when in recreation areas (two prisons).
- Unit staff maintain complete and accurate records of time out-of-cell (one prison).
- All prisoners are given their initial phone call on admission to the Prison (one prison).
- All prisoners subject to separation and medical isolation have access to a television in their cells (one prison).

The Department accepted all of my recommendations.

The Department has reported that steps have been taken to give effect to each of the recommendations.