

Rimutaka Prison

Announced Inspection

December 2023



ARA POUTAMA AOTEAROA
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

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Office of Inspectorate | *Te Tari Tirohia*

Our whakataukī

Mā te titiro me te whakarongo ka puta mai te māramatanga

By looking and listening, we will gain insight

Our vision

That prisoners and offenders are treated in a fair, safe, secure and humane way.

Our values

Respect – We are considerate of the dignity of others

Integrity – We are ethical and do the right thing

Professionalism – We are competent and focused

Objectivity – We are open-minded and do not take sides

Diversity – We are inclusive and value difference

We also acknowledge the Department of Corrections' values: rangatira (leadership), manaaki (respect), wairua (spirituality), kaitiaki (guardianship) and whānau (relationships).



Foreword

The Office of the Inspectorate *Te Tari Tirohia* is a critical part of the independent oversight of the Corrections system and operates under the Corrections Act 2004 and the Corrections Regulations 2005. The Inspectorate, while part of the Department of Corrections, is operationally independent, which is necessary to ensure objectivity and integrity.

The inspection process provides an ongoing invaluable insight into prisons and provides assurance that shortcomings are identified and addressed in a timely way, and that examples of good practice are acknowledged and shared across the prison network.

This report sets out the findings of an announced inspection of Rimutaka Prison. I have chosen to present the findings in this report differently to those in previous prison inspection reports. Rather than presenting detailed findings for each subsection of the report, I instead make overarching findings for priority areas only. I have taken this approach so prison staff and management can see at a glance the findings I consider to be priorities. I expect prison leaders, with support from the wider Department, to create an action plan to address these findings and track their progress. This action plan should be provided to the Office of the Inspectorate. I expect the site to work alongside Corrections national office, when necessary, to address areas that require capital investment or a policy or practice change.

There are many additional observations about practices and processes in the text of the report. These observations are also important, and I hope prison management and staff will find them useful when working to improve outcomes for prisoners.

Overall, the inspection team found Rimutaka Prison was experiencing a very different operating environment to that we found during our last full inspection of the site in 2017.

The site had experienced rapid turnover of senior prison leadership, with several Acting Prison Directors and one permanent Prison Director in the four-year period prior to our inspection. Custodial staff shortages meant the site was operating with 80% of custodial staff. This meant units were regularly understaffed, some custodial staff were fatigued, and there were no rehabilitation programmes or constructive activities available for most prisoners.

A high proportion of prisoners (55%) were on remand and prison network pressures meant staff were managing a more transient and unsettled population, many of whom had no family/whānau support in the area. The increased remand population was causing 'churn' where high numbers of people were received into prison for short periods and then released. All remand prisoners were being managed as high security, and the site was not using the Remand Management Tool which could have led to some remand prisoners being managed in less restrictive environments.

While prisoners were receiving most of their minimum entitlements, including telephone calls and at least an hour out of their cell every day, there were no in-person visits occurring, and there had been no visits since August 2022. Staff were attempting to ameliorate the lack of visits by providing video calls with family/whānau to some prisoners, but the lack of visits was very concerning.

We observed that most prisoners had little to do and that prisoners in the high security part of the prison spent much of their time locked in their cells. Most programme providers, including the Department's own programme facilitators, along with a range of contracted providers and



volunteers, were not permitted on site due to the custodial staff shortages. This meant most rehabilitation and educational programmes had ceased since December 2022.

There was one offence-focused rehabilitation programme available at the site. This was the programme for men with violent offending which took place in the Special Treatment Unit in Unit 9 (Te Whare Manaakitanga). Thirty men were living in this unit, and we found that as well as their rehabilitation programme sessions, these men had access to a range of constructive activities including kapa haka, a tikanga course and whānau hui.

Eighty men had jobs in prison industries, including the horticulture nursery, the prison kitchen and the printshop. These industries offered men the opportunity to gain relevant vocational qualifications. A few men had work as unit cleaners. However, most men did not have jobs.

Education tutors were assessing the educational needs of some men, but not all prisoners were receiving literacy and numeracy assessments. As education providers were not permitted on site and the Secure Online Learning suite was not in use, the only option available to prisoners was self-directed learning. Tutors estimated around a hundred men were engaging in self-directed learning.

A significant number of prisoners (426 men or 57%) identified as Māori, but Māori men in most units told us there were no opportunities to engage in cultural activities as there were no programmes running at the site.

While many prisoners spoke highly of healthcare at the site, we found the health team was significantly understaffed and under pressure. Despite this, they were delivering a good quality of essential services, due to robust processes for managing health requests, the level of peer support within the team, and managers who were supporting them by completing clinical work with prisoners in addition to fulfilling their managerial roles. I consider the level of service provided by this team to be commendable, but morale was low, and the situation was not sustainable.

While site management had a clear focus on safety and security, and most staff we spoke with were professional and engaged, we observed that many staff at Rimutaka were concerned about the staffing situation and the lack of programmes and activities for prisoners. Neither staff nor prisoners knew when the situation would change.

I am pleased to note that the inspection team found four examples of notable positive practice at Rimutaka Prison. We highlight these examples in this report (see pages 14 and 15). Examples include the use of the full body scanning machine which reduced the need to strip search prisoners, and the good practice we found in the Special Treatment Unit in Unit 9. These practices led to improved outcomes for prisoners, and I hope other sites may be able to learn from them.

I acknowledge the cooperation of Rimutaka Prison's management and staff, both during the inspection and since, and I look forward to working with them as I continue to monitor progress.

Janis Adair
Chief Inspector

Overview and findings

1. This report sets out observations from our announced inspection of Rimutaka Prison. Rimutaka Prison is a men's prison in Upper Hutt, north of Wellington.
2. We inspected Rimutaka Prison between 2 – 8 December 2023.
3. At the time of our inspection, Rimutaka Prison was housing 752 prisoners and had an operational capacity of 795 prisoners.
4. The 752 prisoners were comprised of 414 remand and 338 sentenced prisoners. Sentenced prisoners were classified as minimum, low, low medium or high security.

Findings – action required by prison leaders

5. The findings we make in this report are presented differently to the findings in older prison inspection reports. Rather than presenting detailed findings for each subsection of the report, we instead make over-arching findings for key areas only.
6. We have taken this approach so prison staff and management can see at a glance the findings we consider to be priorities. These over-arching findings cover areas that we expect prison leaders, with support from the wider Department, to address in an action plan which sets out how and when the findings will be addressed, and tracks progress. This action plan should be provided to the Office of the Inspectorate.
7. Any additional observations are presented only in the text of the report. These observations are also important, and we hope prison staff and management will find them useful when working to improve practices and processes.

Leadership

Finding 1. There had been little consistency of leadership, with several Acting Prison Directors and one permanent Prison Director in a four-year period. We found current leaders had a strong focus on safety and security, but were facing considerable challenges, including significant ongoing staff shortages.

Prisoner demographics

Finding 2. As in many prisons nationwide, prisoner demographics had changed, with a higher proportion (55%) on remand and more prisoners transferred into or out of the prison due to network pressures. This meant staff were managing a more transient population with higher needs and many prisoners had no family/whānau support in the region.

Custodial staffing shortages

Finding 3. The site was experiencing significant ongoing custodial staff shortages and was operating with 80% of custodial staff. This meant some staff were experiencing fatigue and that most activities for prisoners, including rehabilitation and

education programmes, had ceased since December 2022. In addition, there had been no face-to-face visits since August 2022.

Health staff shortages

Finding 4. The health team was significantly short staffed and under pressure, though was delivering a good quality of service despite this. The team was able to deliver essential services due to the robust processes for managing health requests, the level of peer support within the team, and managers who were supporting them by completing clinical work with prisoners in addition to fulfilling their managerial roles. The level of service provided by this team was commendable, but morale in the team was low and the situation was not sustainable.

Segregation and isolation

Finding 5. In the six-month review period, we found there had been two men on directed segregation for over three months who had been denied association with other prisoners. These men had likely experienced prolonged solitary confinement as that is defined in the Mandela Rules (i.e. more than 22 hours a day without meaningful human interaction, in excess of 15 days). This was concerning.

Finding 6. Directed segregation which continues beyond three months requires regular review and approval by a Visiting Justice. However, in the six-month review period we found two instances where men's segregation had continued beyond three months, but this had not been approved by a Visiting Justice.

Lack of programmes and activities for prisoners

Finding 7. All but one rehabilitation programme at the site had ceased since December 2022 due to custodial staff shortages. Staff and prisoners alike expressed frustration that prisoners could not access rehabilitation programmes at Rimutaka Prison.

Finding 8. While around 80 prisoners had jobs through offender employment industries, there were few constructive activities available, and we observed that most men had little to do.

Finding 9. Not all prisoners were receiving numeracy and literacy assessments, and most education programmes had ceased, though some prisoners were engaging in self-directed learning.

Māori prisoners

Finding 10. A significant proportion of prisoners (57%) identified as Māori. However, Rimutaka Prison was offering very limited cultural support to meet the needs of Māori prisoners.

Minimum entitlements

- Finding 11. It is a minimum entitlement for prisoners to be able to have one 30-minute in-person visit once a week. However, due to custodial staff shortages, the site had ceased in-person visits since August 2022. The site was offering AVL visits with family/whānau to some prisoners as a way to ameliorate the lack of visits, but this was a very concerning situation.
- Finding 12. Prisoners were receiving other minimum entitlements, including access to telephone calls and at least an hour out of their cells in the open air every day. However, we noted that men in the high security units spent most of the day locked in their cells.

Reintegration

- Finding 13. Completing a rehabilitation programme may strengthen a prisoner's readiness for appearance before the New Zealand Parole Board. However, the lack of programmes and activities meant there were limited opportunities for men attempting to ready themselves for release. In addition, the Self Care Unit was closed due to custodial staff shortages, so men nearing release could not be accommodated in this unit.

Prison staff

- Finding 14. While most staff we spoke with were professional and engaged, many staff expressed frustration and concern about the lack of programmes, activities and visits for the prisoners in their care. Staff were concerned about the staffing shortages. Staff did not know when the situation would change.
- Finding 15. The strong focus on safety and security, together with the custodial staff shortages, meant non-custodial staff (including case managers, programme facilitators and Community Corrections staff) had limited access to prisoners.

Introduction

8. The Office of the Inspectorate | Te Tari Tirohia is authorised under section 29(1)(b) of the Corrections Act 2004 to undertake inspections and visits to prisons. Section 157 of the Act provides that when undertaking an inspection, inspectors have the power to access any prisoners, personnel, records, information, Corrections' vehicles or property.
9. The purpose of an Inspectorate prison inspection is to ensure a safe, secure and humane environment by gaining insight into all relevant parts of prison life, including any emerging risks, issues or problems. Inspectors assess prison conditions, management procedures, operational practices, and health care against relevant legislation and our Inspection Standards.
10. The Inspection Standards were developed by the Inspectorate and reflect the prison environment and procedures applicable in New Zealand prisons. In early 2023, we expanded the Inspection Standards to include a series of standards on leadership. The Inspection Standards are informed by:
 - » the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners ('the Nelson Mandela Rules')
 - » HM Inspectorate of Prisons Expectations (England and Wales' equivalent criteria for assessing the treatment and conditions of prisoners)
 - » the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders ('the Bangkok Rules')
 - » the Yogyakarta Principles, which guide the application of human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity.
11. We note that the Office of the Ombudsman is mandated as a national preventive mechanism¹ to examine and monitor the treatment of people in prisons. The Chief Ombudsman's most recent inspection of Rimutaka Prison was a targeted inspection in October 2021.² At that time the prison was operating under COVID-19 Alert Level 2.³ For this reason, the Ombudsman's inspection was shorter and more focused than a full inspection which is why it was referred to as a "targeted inspection".
12. The Inspectorate visited Rimutaka Prison between 2 – 8 December 2023 to carry out the inspection. Our previous visit to Rimutaka Prison was for an unannounced follow-up inspection in October 2019⁴ which followed an announced inspection in October 2017.⁵
13. In addition, regional inspectors from the Inspectorate visit the site regularly to observe unit regimes and practices, to engage with staff, and to enable prisoners to raise concerns. Regional inspectors have oversight of incidents, complaints and allegations against staff at their respective sites.

¹ National Preventive Mechanisms are independent visiting bodies, established at a national level, to examine the conditions of detention and treatment of detainees, and make recommendations for improvement. They aim to ensure the prevention of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

² Office of the Chief Ombudsman (2023) *OPCAT Report on an announced targeted inspection of Rimutaka Prison under the Crimes of Torture Act*, Office of the Chief Ombudsman.

³ See <https://covid19.govt.nz/alert-system/covid-19-alert-system/> for more about New Zealand's COVID-19 alert system.

⁴ Office of the Inspectorate (2020) *Rimutaka Prison Unannounced Follow-Up Inspection October 2019*. Office of the Inspectorate, Wellington.

⁵ Office of the Inspectorate (2019) *Rimutaka Prison Inspection October 2017*. Office of the Inspectorate, Wellington.

14. The fieldwork for the inspection was completed by seven Inspectors and a Clinical Inspector for health-related matters. The inspection was overseen by the Principal Inspector for non-health related areas of prison life. The Assistant Chief Inspector oversaw the Leadership standards.
15. Inspectors assessed the treatment and conditions of prisoners at Rimutaka Prison against the Inspection Standards which consider the following areas of prison life: leadership; escorts, reception and induction; duty of care; health; environment; good order; purposeful activity; reintegration; and prison staff. Inspectors accessed all parts of the prison to complete their assessment.
16. Inspectors may also evaluate how the site is applying the Corrections Act 2004 and the Corrections Regulations 2005, together with relevant Corrections' policies and procedures.
17. Inspectors make their assessments with four key principles in mind, to ensure that prisoners are treated in a fair, safe, secure and humane way. The principles are:
 - » **Safety:** Prisoners are held safely.
 - » **Respect:** Prisoners are treated with respect for human dignity.
 - » **Purposeful activity:** Prisoners are able, and expect, to engage in activity that is likely to benefit them.
 - » **Reintegration:** Prisoners are prepared for release into the community and helped to reduce their likelihood of reoffending.
18. Inspectors carried out:
 - » one-to-one and focus group interviews with 78 prisoners from units across the prison
 - » one-to-one and group interviews with 98 staff members, managers, union representatives and service providers
 - » direct observation of unit procedures, staff duties and relevant staff meetings during the inspection
 - » a physical inspection of the prison environment, including the Health Centre
 - » a review and analysis of relevant information and data from the prison and Corrections databases, including the Integrated Offender Management System (IOMS) and the Corrections Business Reporting and Analysis (COBRA) tool. Our review period for data analysis was the six-month period from 1 May 2023 to 31 October 2023.
19. We were informed by Correction's Hōkai Rangi Strategy 2019-2024 which sets out a strategic direction, aimed at achieving transformative and intergenerational change for prisoners and their whānau.
20. On 13 August 2024, we gave the Corrections Commissioner Custodial Services and the Deputy Chief Executive Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) a draft of this report. They responded to the draft on 17 September 2024 and the response is attached as Appendix B.

Introduction – Rimutaka Prison

21. Rimutaka Prison is one of 15 prisons for men in New Zealand. It is located in Upper Hutt, north of Wellington. The prison was established in 1967 and is now one of New Zealand's largest prisons.
22. At the time of our inspection in December 2023, Rimutaka Prison had an operational capacity of 795 prisoners. At our last inspection in 2019 the prison had capacity for over 1,000 men but the operational capacity of the site had been reduced due to custodial staff shortages.
23. Due to the custodial staff shortages, Rimutaka Prison was operating under a Staffing Level Response Roster based on 80% of custodial staffing. Staffing Level Response Rosters are a temporary medium-term response to ongoing staff shortages. When a site is operating under a Staffing Level Response Roster, site management decide what services they can deliver with 80% of staff, rather than attempting to achieve a standard level of service. We note the Department of Corrections has been actively recruiting to attract more staff.
24. Despite the shortage of custodial staff, we observed that prisoners were receiving most of their minimum entitlements, including spending at least one hour in the open air every day. For example, men in the high security part of the prison were able to exercise in the open air for an hour a day, and men in the low security part spent most of the day unlocked with free access to large open-air compounds.
25. However, at the time of the inspection, prisoners were not receiving in-person visits, even though the ability to receive a 30-minute in-person visit once a week is a minimum entitlement. We heard that visits had not been available since August 2022.
26. We found there were no rehabilitation programmes available except for one for men convicted of violent offences in Unit 9 (the Special Treatment Unit). Most contracted programme providers and volunteers were not permitted on the site due to the shortage of custodial staff.
27. There were limited educational opportunities for prisoners, with self-directed learning via correspondence being the main option. Some men had jobs, either through prison industries or part-time unit-based work, but most did not.
28. Generally we observed that most prisoners had little to do and prisoners in the high security part of the prison spent most of their time locked in their cells. There were no organised constructive activities in most units.
29. Health staff, mental health clinicians, case managers and a range of other non-custodial staff and providers told us it could be difficult to access prisoners due to the shortage of custodial staff.

Overview of prison units

30. At the time of our inspection, the prison's high security facility consisted of 14 units (HM1 to HM14⁶), each containing 30 cells, some of which were double-bunked. These units were sometimes called "the pods" by staff on site. In addition, the high security facility included the Management Unit where prisoners on directed segregation were housed temporarily.⁷

⁶ HM stands for High Medium.

⁷ Corrections Act 2004, Section 58 (1)(a) and (1)(b), allows for segregation for the purposes of security, good order, or the safety of others. A direction expires after 14 days unless the Chief Executive directs that it continues. This situation is reviewed monthly, and if continued after three months, is directed and monitored by a Visiting Justice.

31. We found that while units HM11 and HM12 were still known as Drug Treatment Units, the Drug Treatment Programme was not running, and these units were residential units only.
32. The prison's low security facility had five operational units: Unit 4, Unit 7, Unit 8, Unit 9 and Unit 10. Units 4 and 8 were accommodating mainstream⁸ prisoners and Unit 7 was for those on voluntary segregation.
33. Unit 9 was the Special Treatment Unit, known as Te Whare Manaakitanga. It housed men convicted of violent offences who were taking part in an intensive rehabilitation programme.
34. Unit 10 was divided into two units, Kauri and Rimu. Kauri had 20 cells and Rimu had ten that together formed the High Dependency Unit (HDU). The HDU is a national Corrections resource for prisoners with age-related health conditions or complex health and disability needs and is the only unit of its type in New Zealand.
35. Unit 10 Rimu also had ten cells set around a small compound. At the time of our inspection these cells housed ten men who were waitlisted to relocate to the internal Self Care Unit which was not in use.
36. The prison had an Intervention and Support Unit which primarily housed prisoners assessed as being at risk of self-harm or suicide, or those with acute mental distress.
37. At the time of the inspection some units were not in use due to custodial staff shortages.

Prisoners

38. On 2 December 2023, the first day of our inspection, Rimutaka Prison housed 752 prisoners. Of these, 338 (45%) had been sentenced and 414 (55%) were on remand, with 325 remand convicted (79% of those on remand) and 89 remand accused (21% of those on remand).
39. The number of prisoners and the proportion of those on remand had increased since the same time the previous year. On 2 December 2022, there were 699 prisoners at Rimutaka Prison, with 358 (51%) of those on remand. The rising remand population is significant as remand prisoners generally have higher needs and form a more transient population.
40. In addition, an increased remand population can cause 'churn' where high numbers of people are received into prison for short periods and then released. In the six-month review period for 2023, Rimutaka Prison managed 1,219 prison receptions and 1,163 exits. These numbers were higher than for the same six-month period in 2022 when the prison managed 852 receptions and 779 exits.
41. Information from COBRA in the table below provides an overview of units in the prison, the category of prisoners held there, and the numbers of prisoners in each unit at the time of our inspection on 2 December 2023. We note that prisons sometimes move categories of prisoners to different units or wings, but do not update the unit/wing allocation on IOMS, so this information may not fully reflect the types of prisoners held in each unit.

Unit name	Main category of prisoner/ Unit type	Number of prisoners
Health Centre	Health	1
HM 1	Mainstream	33

⁸ 'Mainstream' prison units are general units for prisoners who are not on directed segregation or voluntary segregation.

Unit name	Main category of prisoner/ Unit type	Number of prisoners
HM 2	Mainstream	30
HM 3	Mainstream	30
HM 4	Voluntary protective custody (i.e. voluntary segregation)	42
HM 5	Mainstream	42
HM 6	Mainstream	34
HM 7	Mainstream	39
HM 8	Voluntary protective custody (i.e. voluntary segregation)	44
HM 9	Mainstream	30
HM 10	Voluntary protective custody (i.e. voluntary segregation)	30
HM 11 Drug Treatment Unit ⁹	Drug Treatment Unit	30
HM 12 Drug Treatment Unit	Drug Treatment Unit	39
HM 13	Mainstream	30
HM 14	Voluntary protective custody (i.e. voluntary segregation)	36
Intervention and Support Unit	Prisoners at risk of self-harm	9
Management (Separates)	Separates Unit	6
Management Unit	Prisoners on directed segregation	12
Unit 4	Mainstream	59
Unit 7	Voluntary protective custody (i.e. voluntary segregation)	60
Unit 8	Mainstream	53
Unit 9 – Te Whare Manaakitanga	Special Treatment Unit for men convicted of violent offending	30
Unit 10 – High Dependency Unit	Prisoners with age-related health conditions or complex health and disability needs	23
Unit 10 – Rimu	Mainstream	10
	Total	752

⁹ While HM11 and HM12 were named and classified as Drug Treatment Units, COBRA data showed no starts and no completions of the Drug Treatment Programme in the six-month review period.

42. Of the 338 sentenced prisoners at the prison on 2 December 2023, 82 had a high security classification, 90 had a low medium security classification, 95 were low security, and 64 were minimum security. Seven prisoners had not yet been classified.
43. The 414 remand prisoners (i.e. 55% of the total number of prisoners) were being managed in high security environments.
44. Of the total of 752 prisoners, 426 (57%) identified as Māori, followed by 212 (28%) who identified as European. Eighty-two prisoners (11%) identified as Pacific peoples, and 28 men (4%) were classed as 'Other'. The ethnicity of four men was not recorded/unknown.
45. At the time of the inspection, six prisoners were aged 19 or under, and 62 were aged 20 – 24. There were 53 prisoners aged 60 or over.
46. Two prisoners identified as transgender at the time of our inspection.

Staff

47. As previously mentioned, Rimutaka Prison, in common with other prisons in New Zealand, was still being affected by the nationwide shortage of custodial staff that followed the COVID-19 pandemic. The prison was operating under a Staffing Level Response Roster based on 80% of custodial staffing.
48. Corrections data¹⁰ showed that Rimutaka Prison has 391 FTE custodial positions, but at the time of our inspection was operating with 328.6 custodial staff (i.e. 62.4 FTE vacancies). We note that 15 of the custodial staff were new recruits completing the Corrections Officer Development Pathway.
49. Rimutaka Prison had 27.2 FTE staff in offender employment instructor roles. This area was fully staffed.
50. Rimutaka Prison had 30 FTE staff in case management roles. This team was fully staffed.
51. At the time of our inspection the health team was significantly short staffed. The Regional Clinical Director supplied the following figures:
 - » 35.2 FTE Registered Nurse roles with 20.6 FTE in role (i.e. 14.6 FTE vacancies). At the time of our inspection two FTE nurses were unavailable to work.
 - » 14 FTE Health Care Assistant roles with 13 FTE in role (i.e. a vacancy of one FTE). At the time of our inspection one health care assistant was unavailable to work.
 - » 3 FTE Administration Support Officer roles, with 2.8 in role (i.e. vacancy of 0.2 FTE).
52. In addition, Corrections data at the time of the inspection showed the health leadership team had seven members, comprised of a Health Centre Manager, two Assistant Health Centre Managers, one Clinical Manager Mental Health, one Assistant Clinical Manager Mental Health, and two Clinical Team Leaders, of which one was a vacancy.
53. This equates to 59.2 total FTE roles in the health team, with 42.4 FTE in role (i.e. a total of 16.8 FTE vacancies).

Complaints received and reviews by the Inspectorate

54. In the six-month review period from 1 May 2023 to 31 October 2023, the Inspectorate received two information requests and 135 complaints from prisoners at Rimutaka Prison.

¹⁰ From the Corrections data services portal.

The three most common complaint categories were Prisoner Property (33 complaints), Prisoner Transfers and Movements (22 complaints) and Health Services (21 complaints).

55. In the same period, prisoners made 94 allegations against staff which were recorded in the Allegations Against Staff database (IR.07 process).¹¹
56. The Inspectorate was involved in one statutory review of the misconduct process at Rimutaka Prison.¹²
57. The Inspectorate was involved in three death in custody investigations at Rimutaka Prison during the review period.

Previous Office of the Inspectorate Inspection Reports

58. Our previous visit to Rimutaka Prison was for an unannounced follow-up inspection in October 2019, which followed an announced inspection in October 2017. The 2017 inspection identified that the prison generally provided a good environment in which prisoners' needs were met. However, at the time, the increased prisoner population, gang membership, and access to contraband had created conditions that gave some prisoners the opportunity to engage in violence. A broad range of rehabilitation activities was available to lower security prisoners, but high security prisoners had limited access to work, rehabilitation, and education programmes.

Notable Positive Practice

59. In this section, we highlight some of the positive practice we found at Rimutaka Prison. We looked for innovative practices that led to improved outcomes for prisoners and from which other sites may be able to learn. We also found certain areas of practice where staff were doing 'business as usual' but were performing well, or under complex or challenging circumstances. Inspectors found four examples of notable positive practice during our inspection of Rimutaka Men's Prison.
60. Staff and prisoners alike were positive about the full body scanning machine in the Receiving Office. The full body scanner meant prisoners being received or prisoners suspected of having contraband could be scanned while fully clothed and were therefore not required to be strip searched. Prisoners we interviewed told us being scanned was more dignified than being strip searched. Staff told us the full body scanner was effective in finding contraband and meant prisoners were more relaxed as they were not required to be strip searched (see paragraphs 95 to 99 for more information).
61. We observed the health team was delivering a good quality of service despite being significantly understaffed and under pressure. The team was able to deliver essential services due to the robust processes for managing health requests, the level of peer support within the team, and managers who were supporting them by completing clinical work with prisoners in addition to fulfilling their managerial roles. Several prisoners remarked on the observant, respectful and kind treatment they had received from members of the health team. We look forward to seeing what this team can achieve when fully staffed (see paragraphs 220 to 238 in the Provision of Health Care section, paragraph 281 in the Mental Health Care section, and paragraphs 628 to 634 in the Staff section).

¹¹ The Inspectorate is notified of all allegations by prisoners about poor staff behaviour, recorded in an IR.07. The Inspectorate may decide to monitor the prison's process in dealing with these allegations.

¹² The misconduct process deals with allegations of poor prisoner behaviour. The Inspectorate can only review the timeliness of this process. If a prisoner is unhappy with the outcome of a misconduct process, it is referred to a Visiting Justice (external judge).



62. Two prisoners we spoke with spoke highly of the 'rainbow nurse' who was a nurse prisoners could approach about issues relating to gender and sexuality. These prisoners told us they appreciated this nurse's specialty, and that the nurse was compassionate and welcoming. The prisoners told us other prisoners also sought out this nurse due to their inclusivity and speciality in gender diversity (see paragraph 282 in the Mental Health Care section).
63. The Men with Violent Offending programme took place in the Special Treatment Unit in Unit 9 (Te Whare Manaakitanga) and we observed that as well as completing the offence-focused rehabilitation programme sessions, men in this unit could access a range of constructive activities including kapa haka, tikanga classes, and whānau hui. We observed that custodial and clinical staff in this unit worked well together and were respectful of each other's roles. We observed positive interactions between staff and prisoners. Prisoners we spoke with told us they mentored each other and held each other to account because they wanted the unit to continue as a community (see paragraphs 511 to 517 for more information).

Inspection

Leadership

Inspection Standards

- Leaders provide direction, and work collaboratively with staff, stakeholders and prisoners, to set and communicate strategic priorities that will improve outcomes for prisoners.
- Leaders create a culture in which staff and other stakeholders willingly engage in activities to improve outcomes for prisoners.
- Leaders provide the necessary resources to enable good outcomes for prisoners.
- Leaders focus on delivering priorities that support good outcomes for prisoners. They closely monitor progress against these priorities.

64. In early 2023, we expanded our Inspection Standards to include a series of standards on leadership. In these standards, the term 'leader' refers to any person with leadership or management responsibility in the prison.
65. Since our last follow-up inspection of Rimutaka Prison in 2019, there had been significant changes in the operating environment, coupled with a rapid turnover of prison leadership and, more recently, staff. In just under four years, the site had had several acting Prison Directors and one permanent Prison Director.¹³ With the added challenges of the global COVID-19 pandemic, custodial staff shortages, custodial staff turnover of 39%, an increasing remand population, a prisoner escape in 2022, and impacts on the site arising from Operation Portia (a police anti-corruption and bribery investigation which commenced in 2020), those who provided leadership on site have had to navigate their way through profound complexity and uncertainty.
66. During the inspection, we observed a dynamic management environment, with decisions taken quickly where necessary, reflecting a clear sense of purpose, with a strong emphasis on the safety and security of the prison.
67. We heard that key operational decisions were made at the senior management level at daily briefings at 8am. Decisions were then passed on to managers in the units to disseminate to staff, along with other information covering areas such as risk, security, and acknowledgement of good work.
68. Feedback provided to us by several staff closer to the front line suggested that this approach of cascading information did not always work well for them. Some staff told us key information, such as changes in regime, was received at the last minute or not at all. This could make it difficult when fielding questions from prisoners and understanding why certain changes were being made.
69. As previously mentioned, prisoners had limited access to programmes and activities due to the shortage of custodial staff, and we observed that prisoners in the high security part of the prison were experiencing a restrictive regime where they spent most of their time locked

¹³ We note that from April 2024, Corrections changed the job titles of various roles, including Prison Directors, who are now known as General Managers of prisons. However, this report uses the job titles that were correct at the time of our inspection.

in their cells. Prisoners were receiving most of their minimum entitlements, but there were no face-to-face visits occurring at the site. The site had a process in place for staff to request that senior managers approved or declined additional activities. The Senior Advisor to the Prison Director told us Tier 5 managers and above met weekly to consider these requests. The Prison Director did not attend the meetings, but made the final decision on any activities that had been agreed at the meeting. We reviewed a decision log from the meetings for the period 1 January 2023 to 7 December 2023 and found the managers had considered 55 requests for additional activities, of which 30 had been approved and 22 declined or deferred. The remainder were either pending or had been approved with conditions. Examples of approved activities included a face-to-face whānau visit for a prisoner on compassionate grounds, an in-person visit from reintegration providers, and psychological sessions in high security units. However, some other psychological sessions had been declined. Other examples of declined activities included whānau hui, church services, and visits from an imam.

70. We were told the representatives of the Corrections Association New Zealand (CANZ) and the Public Service Association (PSA), the two main unions on site, enjoyed a positive relationship with prison management, and that their members generally felt supported. The main issues of concern for the unions included custodial staff shortages and the SLR rosters that had been introduced as a consequence, staff fatigue, the number of inexperienced staff (with less than two years' service) who "don't know what normal looks like", and changes in regime which, we heard, were not consulted on but that staff were told about after the decisions had been made, and which were described as "unsettling" for both staff and prisoners. Concerns around the SLR rosters were echoed by other staff we talked with.
71. Some staff also raised concerns about variable shift rosters.¹⁴ These concerns centred around the way the roster divided custodial staff into two teams, leading to inconsistencies in practice and the loss of unit training days. In addition, staff told us that working successive 12-hour night shifts led to fatigue which created safety concerns for those staff who had to drive long distances home. One staff member said there were rooms available in the old staff college that could be used to mitigate fatigue after a night shift, but that staff were charged \$30 to use them.
72. There were polarised views on the current style of leadership on site. From the perspective of the CANZ representative the current Prison Director had "transformed the place, because he held his tier 5 managers and PCOs to account. Staff see the managers now and the whole dynamic has changed". Consequently, "our members feel supported" and "the mood of the site is better now than before the staff shortages". This view was largely echoed by the PSA representative who told us "the Prison Director and Deputy Prison Directors have been a lot more visible over the last 12-18 months, particularly in the high security units". Further, the PSA representative told us, "The unit briefings work well. They are well-structured and there is more of an emphasis on safety conversations. Staff can provide feedback at any time, and this is invited."
73. This positivity was not always reflected in the many conversations we had with custodial and non-custodial staff and other stakeholders across the site. We spoke with a range of custodial staff from across the site, including those from high and low security units, both long-serving and recently recruited, and those providing 'surge support' from other sites.¹⁵ They told us that, compared with the past, decision-making had moved up the line with Principal

¹⁴ Corrections introduced variable shift rosters to provide alternatives to eight-hour shifts for custodial staff in prisons.

¹⁵ 'Surge support' refers to Corrections' practice of redeploying prison staff to other prisons that are experiencing greater staff shortages.

Corrections Officers making fewer decisions than before. Communication appeared to be perceived as the most problematic area. Examples included changes of regime being introduced with little or no notice, and being implemented at the weekend when there were fewer staff and no managers around. Some staff felt that people were anxious to make decisions because they would be blamed if things went wrong. We were told they usually found out about key decisions in emails, or more commonly through word of mouth, sometimes from the prisoners themselves.

74. The impacts of the challenging operating environment at the time of our inspection were significant. While there was a clear sense of purpose and a strong emphasis on safety and security, there were few meaningful and constructive activities to improve outcomes for prisoners. Issues such as the lack of programmes, education, Release to Work, face-to-face visits with family/whānau, the temporary closure of the whare (i.e. Unit 5) and the chapel, and the suspension of church services for high security prisoners were raised with us by a wide range of non-custodial staff and stakeholders. In addition, we heard it was sometimes difficult for case managers and probation officers to access prisoners, especially for the purpose of completing pre-sentence interviews.
75. We were told these issues were a consequence of increasing prisoner numbers (and a more challenging demographic), high staff turnover and recruitment challenges. The tipping point, in the view of senior staff we spoke with, was the implementation of an SLR roster in September 2022, and the direction from the National Commissioner that the site was to accommodate additional high-security prisoners due to pressures across the prison network. We were shown emails and communications collateral that confirmed this situation.
76. It is our view that ownership of these issues, and the solutions that are urgently required to address them, sits not solely with site leadership but are shared with regional and national leadership.

Escorts, reception and induction

Escorts and transfers

Inspection Standards

- Prisoners travel in safe, decent conditions and are treated with respect, and attention is paid to their individual needs.
- Prisoners understand why and where they are being transferred to.

77. Prisoners are transported to and from Rimutaka Prison for a range of reasons, including arrival from court (either on remand or after sentencing), transfers to and from other prisons, and escorts out for medical or reintegration appointments.
78. Most prisoners had been transported over land in Prisoner Escort Vehicles (PEVs). PEVs are vans fitted with metal compartments in the back to create individual cells. Each compartment has a fitted metal seat, a light, a tinted window, a vent for air-conditioning/heating, and a camera on the ceiling for staff to monitor prisoners. Each PEV cell contains an intercom speaker that escorting staff can use to communicate with prisoners. These intercoms are controlled by staff and prisoners cannot initiate communication. There are no toilets in these vehicles. PEV cells contain drains in the floor which are not intended as urinals, but which are sometimes used that way.
79. We inspected a PEV that had eight individual cells, and which was being used to transfer prisoners between Manawātū and Rimutaka Prisons. We observed that the cells in the PEV were clean and there were no unpleasant odours. Escort staff told us they had a cleaning kit on board and cleaned the cells after every use. We also saw that each cell had a bottle of water and a muesli bar on the seat, ready for the next prisoner.
80. We observed prisoners being brought out of holding cells in the Receiving Office and boarding the PEV. Each prisoner carried a paper bag that contained personal items. Other prisoner property and prisoner files were stored in the van. As per Corrections policy, low or minimum security prisoners were not handcuffed in the PEV.
81. We observed Receiving Office staff communicating well with prisoners as they were boarding the PEV. Escort staff told us that they communicated regularly with prisoners during the trip to keep them informed of progress. They told us this helped prisoners remain calm.
82. We interviewed a number of prisoners about their PEV transportation experiences. All had received water and felt they had been treated respectfully. Some prisoners had comfort and safety concerns about travelling in PEVs. They told us the only way to communicate with staff during the journey was to bang on the wall or wave at the camera to get attention. In addition, although the metal seats had padded squabs, prisoners were seated backwards and had no seatbelts.
83. The Principal Corrections Officer in the Receiving Office told us transgender prisoners would be transported in the same PEV as other prisoners, but would be kept separate in holding cells before or after transfers or escorts. We interviewed one transgender prisoner who had experienced an escort. She said staff had been good and she had no issues regarding the escort.

84. All prisoners who travel in a PEV must be accompanied by an Instructions for Escorts form¹⁶ which contains their personal details and lists any special instructions, risk mitigations and medication, so escorting staff are aware of their individual needs. Inspectors reviewed nine of these forms and found they had accompanied prisoners and contained an appropriate level of detail. However, we found the name of the sending site and the name of the receiving site had been recorded as being the same on all nine forms, which was incorrect.
85. Corrections has specific guidance for how transfers should be conducted, including that prisoners must be informed of an impending transfer, and the destination, at least seven days in advance, or given as much prior notice as possible under the circumstances. There may be instances where prisoners are not informed in advance, generally for safety and security reasons.¹⁷
86. We interviewed three men who were waiting in holding cells in the Receiving Office before being transported by PEV to Manawatū Prison. The men told us they had not been given sufficient notice about their pending transfers. Two men said they were told the night before and one man had been told that morning. None of the three knew why they were being transferred, though they all knew they were being transferred to Manawatū Prison. We reviewed the IOMS notes for these three men and found no recorded reasons why they had not have been given seven days advance notice about their transfers.
87. We spoke to several other men who had recently been transferred to Rimutaka Prison. Many of these men also reported they had not been told why they were being transferred or given sufficient notice. While this reflects on practice at the sites the men had been transferred from rather than practice at Rimutaka Prison, it suggests that poor communication with prisoners about transfers may be a wider issue.
88. Prisoners may be transferred by air on a commercial or chartered flight. At Rimutaka Prison, prisoners are taken to and from the airport on a special vehicle that is fitted with 22 individual metal cells. We observed 17 prisoners being taken individually from holding cells in the Receiving Office, processed according to Corrections policy, and boarding the vehicle. We observed that the cells in the vehicle were clean and there were no unpleasant odours. Staff informed us that all prisoners were provided with food and water.

Reception and induction

Inspection Standards

- Prisoners are safe and treated with respect on their reception and during their first days in prison. Prisoners' immediate needs are identified on arrival and staff ensure that individuals' immediate anxieties are addressed before the end of the first day.
- Prisoners are promptly inducted and supported to understand life in prison and know what will happen to them next.

¹⁶ POM M.04.01.Form.01

¹⁷ POM M.04.03.04 sets out that there are certain circumstances where the requirement to inform a prisoner of an impending transfer does not apply. These circumstances include that the prisoner to be transferred is expected to create a management difficulty before the transfer is made or as a result of the transfer, or the transfer is being made because there are reasonable grounds to believe that the safety of the prisoner or others at the prison within which the prisoner currently resides is at risk, or the transfer is being made to restore or maintain the security and order of the prison from which the prisoner is being transferred.

- Prisoners can access legal advice and, where applicable, a consular representative.
- Information relating to prison life is accessible for all prisoners.

89. When prisoners arrive at or leave a prison they are processed through the Receiving Office. Here, custodial staff should confirm a prisoner's identity, undertake a Reception Risk Assessment and a brief Immediate Needs Assessment, and process prisoner property. Staff should also provide a site induction to explain prison rules and regulations. Health staff conduct a Reception Health Screen. Prisoners are allowed one free national telephone call to let family/whānau know where they are.
90. As previously mentioned, staff in the Receiving Office at Rimutaka Prison were managing an increase in receptions and exits when compared to the previous year. In the six-month review period for 2023, Rimutaka Prison managed 1,219 prison receptions and 1,163 exits. These numbers were higher than for the same six-month period in 2022 when the prison managed 852 receptions and 779 exits.
91. At the time of our inspection, the Receiving Office had six holding cells, four of which contained toilets. There was another separate toilet, three interview rooms, cabinets and shelving for prisoners' files, and a large property storage area.
92. The Receiving Office was clean and tidy but seemed cramped and not well organised. It was hot and airless with limited natural light. There was no air conditioning, though staff had turned on fans and opened a large roller door in the Property Office section to let in some fresh air.
93. We observed Receiving Office staff processing several prisoners. Prisoners were offered sandwiches and water upon arrival. Prisoners then changed into prison clothing and were given a second set of prison clothing in a paper bag to take to their unit.
94. Prisoners were processed one at a time. We observed staff following correct reception processes, including identity checks, organising fingerprinting and PIN codes for prisoner self-service kiosks, and checking details of the prisoner's nominated contact person. None of the prisoners we spoke with reported having their initial telephone call in the Receiving Office, but told us they were able to make this call on arrival in their unit, or the following day.
95. Generally, all prisoners must be strip searched on reception to ensure they are not attempting to bring contraband into the prison. However, Corrections is in the process of introducing full body scanners to prisons nationwide and we observed that the Receiving Office at Rimutaka Prison had a full body scanning machine (see image 1 in Appendix A). This meant prisoners being received were scanned for contraband while fully clothed and not required to be strip searched. Prisoners who did not wish to be scanned could choose to be strip-searched instead. In addition, prisoners walked through a metal detector.
96. In its practice guidance on the use of full body scanners for staff, Corrections sets out on its intranet that "The introduction of full body scanners as an additional search option will... strengthen the safety and security of a prison and modernise the way we work in a correctional environment by significantly reducing the need for strip searching. This will ensure better alignment with our strategy, *Hōkai Rangi – Ara Poutama Aotearoa Strategy 2019-2024*, through a solution which is culturally aware, health focused, gender responsive

and trauma informed. It is not expected that full body scanning searches will completely remove the need to strip search.”¹⁸

97. At Rimutaka Prison, staff and prisoners alike were positive about the full body scanner. The Senior Corrections Officer in the Receiving Office told us they had been using the full body scanner since March 2021 and that it had eased the reception searching process as it enabled prisoners to maintain their dignity which meant they were more relaxed.
98. Prisoners we interviewed told us they preferred the full body scanner as it was more dignified than being strip searched.
99. Additionally, staff in the Receiving Office reported that the full body scanner was effective in finding contraband, and that the technology appeared to be deterring people from trying to bring in banned items. Staff told us they held this view due to the amount of contraband and banned items they would find left in the holding cells.
100. Once prisoners had been scanned, they received a reception risk assessment and immediate needs assessment in a private non-contact interview room. At the time of our inspection, these assessments were completed by a custodial staff member from the Intervention and Support Unit.
101. We reviewed a sample of ten reception risk assessments that had been completed for recent arrivals. We found that nurses had been consulted regarding all ten assessments, according to policy. All forms had been fully completed with no sections missed. However, the information given was mostly generic. For example, for the free text section “Custodial Assessment – Assessor Observations”, the same wording was used on the majority of the assessments.
102. Most of the ten reception risk assessments showed the custodial staff member had assessed the prisoners as not being at risk of self-harm. One assessment showed evidence of good practice where a nurse did not agree with the ‘not at risk’ assessment by the custodial officer. This prisoner was placed in the Intervention and Support Unit and referred for further assessment as per policy.
103. We asked staff in the Receiving Office about processes for receiving prisoners who spoke limited English. Staff told us, if necessary, they used the approved 0800 number to telephone an interpreter. We observed that a poster showing the 0800 number for the interpreter service was on display.
104. We asked staff in the Receiving Office about processes for receiving transgender prisoners. Staff told us they had easy access to a printed resource that would enable them to complete the correct processes. In addition, the Senior Corrections Officer was able to explain the correct processes to us, showing a good understanding of the principles of transgender prisoner management.¹⁹
105. We interviewed one transgender prisoner about her experience in the Receiving Office. She said her experience had been acceptable. She told us staff had asked what name and pronouns she wanted them to use. She had asked to be placed on voluntary segregation and this had occurred. She said she had not been asked if she wanted to be in a men’s or women’s prison, though she was “fine” about being in a men’s prison. We confirmed that she had a transgender alert on IOMS.

¹⁸ Practice Guidance: Use of Full Body Scanner V4 document downloaded from Corrections intranet.

¹⁹ Prison Operations Manual I.10 Management of transgender prisoners.

106. In the Receiving Office, prisoners should be inducted into prison life by being given comprehensive information about prison rules and regimes. We did not observe any prison site inductions occurring. Staff told us inductions occurred in the units, but prisoners gave us varied accounts about inductions in units.
107. Some prisoners in the high security units told us they had received a unit induction. However, some other prisoners in these units told us they had not received one and had instead learned unit rules and routines from other prisoners. They told us this meant there were gaps in their knowledge about what was available at the site. For example, some men told us they had not known they could request a video call with family/whānau, or had not known how to use the prisoner self-service kiosk. One prisoner commented that it would be very hard for a new prisoner to know what was going on. Another prisoner talked about helping other men in the unit with their telephone lists and trust account details as “they don’t know how to do stuff”. One man told us he thought inductions were not done due to custodial staff shortages.
108. A Senior Corrections Officer in one of the high security units told us staff gave newly arrived prisoners a “run down” of unit rules and expectations but had not been conducting official inductions due to custodial staff shortages.
109. Some prisoners in high security units told us they had been given an ‘induction booklet’ but that this had not been comprehensive and had mainly been forms to sign. We requested a copy of this induction booklet and confirmed that it was mostly comprised of forms for prisoners to sign. While the forms contained important information about prison rules, the booklet also contained information which was out of date (for example, it gave days and times for visits but at the time of our inspection no visits were occurring at Rimutaka Prison) and lacked some standard information we would expect to find in an induction booklet, such as information about prisoners’ rights and entitlements.
110. We observed a new prisoner arriving in one of the high security units from the Receiving Office. Staff greeted him in an appropriate manner, shook his hand, gave him a bedding pack and showed him to his cell. We observed him making his initial telephone call. However, we did not observe a unit induction taking place.
111. Prisoners in low security units generally told us they had received a unit induction. Custodial staff in low security units told us they printed out an induction booklet and gave it to prisoners to keep. Staff told us if the prisoner was new they would sit down with them and go through the booklet to ensure the prisoner understood. We observed staff conducting a unit induction interview with a prisoner in one of the low security units and felt it was a good induction to the unit, with information about AVL visits and expectations around work.

Health screening on entry

Inspection Standards

- Prisoners’ immediate physical and mental health needs, including substance use and prescription medication needs are assessed on reception and responded to promptly and effectively.

112. A Reception Health Screen should be undertaken by nursing staff at the Receiving Office for all people newly arrived at prison. This is the first opportunity to obtain health information about a prisoner and identify any immediate health needs that need to be addressed.

113. We reviewed the Reception Health Screen notes for five prisoners prior to the inspection, and also observed the Reception Health Screen process on site on two occasions during the week of the inspection. All men received a Reception Health Screen on the day they arrived as required by Corrections policy. We found that nurses conducted all the appropriate assessments, and requested prisoners' community health records to support continuity of care and prescribing in almost all cases.
114. During our site visit, we observed that health staff completed the Reception Health Screen appropriately. They also provided care when necessary. For example, one man arrived with a wound that required immediate attention. The nurse dressed the wound, and, after noticing he was coughing intermittently, also undertook a COVID-19 test.
115. As part of the Reception Health Screen, health staff should ask prisoners about their use of alcohol and drugs. From our review of the Reception Health Screen notes for five prisoners, we found that nurses had screened appropriately for drug and alcohol withdrawal. During our visit to the Receiving Office, we observed that health staff screened for this issue as well. None of the prisoners we observed being screened required support with alcohol or drug withdrawal, although we only observed a small number of men coming directly from court into prison. Most people we observed were transferring into Rimutaka Prison from another prison, therefore acute drug or alcohol withdrawal would be less of an issue for these prisoners.
116. From our review of the Reception Health Screen notes for five prisoners, we found that nurses had conducted assessments for risk of self-harm or suicide as per Corrections policy.
117. We observed that privacy was compromised for men receiving their Reception Health Screen as the interview room doors remained open, allowing the conversation to be overheard by a custodial officer standing immediately outside the room. Staff told us nurses used their discretion regarding the closing of doors, but that staff safety was paramount.
118. At the time of our inspection, some men in the Receiving Office displayed escalated and distressed behaviour and we observed nurses and the Health Centre Manager employing skilful communication techniques to help calm these men. Two men told health staff they had not wanted to be transferred to Rimutaka Prison because it took them away from family/whānau. One man told health staff that several men, including him, had been subject to a Control and Restraint technique to get them into the PEV, and told if they did not comply, they would not get their property. We confirmed this man had been subject to a Control and Restraint technique at Whanganui Prison. On arrival at Rimutaka Prison, this man's property was not available. The Health Centre Manager later confirmed that this man's property had not travelled with him.
119. We observed a nurse explaining to prisoners how to request to see health services by completing a health request form. Nurses should also give newly arrived prisoners the "Your Health in Prison" brochure which explains what health services are available in prison and how to access them. However, we did not observe prisoners receiving this brochure.
120. We observed that nurses completed the Initial Health Assessment in the Receiving Office at the same time as the Reception Health Screen. However, the Corrections Health Care Pathway sets out that the Reception Health Screen results in a priority score which should determine the timing of the Initial Health Assessment to occur within 24 hours, 10 days, or 30 days, depending on the person's need. The Initial Health Assessment is comprehensive, and the Receiving Office is not an appropriate place in which to conduct it due to the busy environment and, potentially, the physical and mental state of the prisoner. We did note that if the prisoner was not able to engage in the longer, more comprehensive Initial Health

Assessment, or if the nurse did not consider it appropriate for any other reason, they did not complete the assessment at reception.

121. The Health Centre Manager advised us that nurses undertook the Initial Health Assessment on reception as men were frequently transferred from other prisons with this assessment overdue. This meant men potentially had long-standing unmet health needs. Furthermore, the Health Centre Manager told us it could be difficult to get men to appointments for the Initial Health Assessment once they left the Receiving Office. This could be due to custodial or health staffing shortages, unit regimes, or the men themselves not wanting to have the assessment at a later time. Therefore, while acknowledging that the Receiving Office was not an ideal environment to conduct the Initial Health Assessment, the Health Centre Manager told us she viewed it as the best option to meet men's health needs as soon as they arrived at Rimutaka Prison.
122. During our inspection, the Clinical Inspector observed group of prisoners arriving from the airport where they had been transferred from another prison. There were 18 men on the vehicle and it was after 5.30 pm, so most health staff had left for the day. This meant performing a Reception Health Screen for each man in a dedicated room could not occur. Instead, the Health Centre Manager conducted an initial triage screen of each man as he exited the vehicle. If she had concerns about anyone, he was moved to the reception health area for further assessment. Although the Health Centre Manager managed the situation well, it was concerning to see standard Reception Health Screening practices compromised.
123. We observed that one of the men on the vehicle was near collapse as he disembarked. A wheelchair was brought for him and he was immediately taken to the health centre where a comprehensive physical assessment was completed. He was given water and his health improved after 30 minutes. Later, we learned the air conditioning on the vehicle had partially failed, and also that the man had medical conditions that had required extra oversight, but which had not been included on his health transfer form.
124. All the prisoners we interviewed across the prison who remembered the reception process confirmed they had seen a nurse on reception. Not all were able to tell us if they had later received a more comprehensive Initial Health Assessment.

Prison Placement²⁰

Inspection Standards

- Where possible, prisoners are housed in prisons close to their families or in prisons which meet their rehabilitative needs.

125. Most of the prisoners we interviewed were not housed in a prison close to their family/whānau. Some of them told us if they had been in a prison closer to home, they would have received visits from family/whānau and friends.
126. Many of these prisoners told us they had been transferred due to prison population pressures (i.e. because Corrections needed more available beds in certain prisons). Some prisoners did not know why they had been transferred.

²⁰ This section deviates from the Inspection Standards but draws together those standards relevant to prison placement at reception.



127. We spoke to one prisoner who told us he had transferred to Rimutaka Prison to complete a rehabilitation programme. However, when he arrived, he had been told the programme was not running. He was now being housed in a more restrictive environment than he had come from and no longer had a job, which he had had at the previous prison he had been in. In addition, he had missed a medical appointment due to being transferred.

Duty of care

Access to legal advisers and attendance at court hearings

Inspection Standards

- Prisoners have reasonable access to consult with a legal advisor.
- An audio-visual link can be used for eligible court cases and for other legal consultations.²¹

128. Prisoners have a right to be able to consult their legal advisor in private. Generally, prisoners across Rimutaka Prison told us they could communicate with their lawyer in private by telephone, AVL visit or by mail.
129. Prisoners in units across the prison told us if they wanted to speak with their lawyer, they could ask unit staff to call and leave a message for the lawyer to call the prisoner. When the lawyer called back, staff would transfer the call to a non-contact interview room with a telephone so the prisoner could speak to their lawyer in private. Prisoners told us this system worked well because staff were responsive and made calls in a timely manner. Some prisoners said there could be issues if the lawyer did not call back quickly enough, because if the period of unlock ended and the prisoner was locked in his cell, staff would not unlock him to take the lawyer's call.
130. We observed that many non-contact interview rooms in use in the high security part of the prison were dirty, and some did not contain chairs for prisoners (see image 2 in Appendix A). In addition, the doors of the rooms were not locked which meant other prisoners could enter while prisoners were speaking with their lawyers which compromised their privacy.
131. Prisoners are able to have up to ten approved personal telephone numbers that they can ring from prisoner telephones; these calls may be monitored or recorded. In addition to the ten personal numbers, prisoners can request to have two lawyers' numbers on their approved telephone number lists so they can ring their lawyers directly during unlock hours. These calls to lawyers should not be monitored or recorded. We observed a staff notice dated 7 December 2022 informing staff that prisoners could add two lawyers' numbers to their approved telephone lists. The Principal Corrections Officer of one high security unit told us they now followed this practice. However, we heard that in other units there was inconsistency about whether prisoners were allowed to have two lawyers' numbers on their approved telephone number lists.
132. The site had an AVL suite with six AVL booths and four holding cells which was located in the high security area of the prison. The suite was approximately ten years old and we observed it was clean and in good working order. The suite was used for lawyers' consultations, court hearings, Provision of Advice to Court report interviews, pre-sentence report interviews and restorative justice meetings. The prison provided a document which showed that, on average, 22 AVL sessions took place each weekday. We observed three custodial staff managing AVL escorts and AVL sessions well.

²¹ Note this is an indicator – not a standard.

133. Custodial staff in some units told us they would escort prisoners to the AVL suite 15 minutes before a court hearing so they had time to talk with their lawyer first.
134. The Management Unit and the Intervention and Support Unit had their own AVL suites.
135. In the Management Unit, staff told us they would facilitate calls to lawyers by contacting the lawyer and transferring the call to a portable telephone which a prisoner could use in his cell. Staff would also book AVL calls and face-to-face visits with lawyers if prisoners requested these. There was a non-contact booth in the unit for face-to-face visits.
136. In the Intervention and Support Unit, staff told us they would facilitate calls to lawyers by contacting the lawyer and transferring the call to an interview room. However, a staff member would remain present, so calls were not private. The Principal Corrections Officer of this unit told us there was no suitable place for prisoners to take lawyer's calls in private as it was not safe for prisoners who had been assessed as being at risk of self-harm to be left on their own in an interview room. We were also told it was not possible for prisoners in this unit to have face-to-face lawyer's visits.
137. Staff reported that the suite in the Management Unit sometimes had an echo that made it difficult to hear court proceedings. Staff told us one judge refused to use it due to the echo, so they had to escort people to the Intervention and Support Unit AVL suite instead. Staff told us management were aware of the issue and were trying to resolve it.
138. We were told that due to custodial staff shortages, the Intervention and Support Unit was only using its AVL suite for court appearances. Previously, prisoners had also been able to use the suite to talk to their lawyers, but this was not happening at the time of the inspection. Prisoners in this unit could still contact their lawyers by telephone.
139. AVL hearings with the New Zealand Parole Board occurred in a separate AVL booth/suite near the visits area. We heard there were no in-person board hearings occurring at the site at the time of the inspection. In-person board hearings had not taken place since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bullying and violence reduction

Inspection Standards

- Prisoners feel safe from bullying, abuse and violence.

140. In the six-month review period, there were 540 incidents at Rimutaka Prison that were categorised in IOMS as "prisoner behaviour", which includes abuse/threats and assaults.
141. Twenty-eight of the 540 incidents were prisoner on prisoner assaults. None of these were categorised as serious and therefore did not require notification to the incident line.
142. Nineteen of the 540 incidents were prisoner on staff assaults, of which eight required notification to the incident line due to their nature or severity.
143. In line with the site's focus on reducing violence and aggression, all assaults on staff were referred to Police.
144. A review of IOMS showed that 344 men (46%) of the 752 on site were registered as gang affiliated. Thirty-seven different gangs had at least one member on site. The three gangs with the most members at the site were Mongrel Mob (127 men), Black Power (76 men) and

Nomads (44 men). This is significant as high gang populations in prisons can be challenging to manage and may lead to incidents. We noted the site had a Gang Engagement Plan, dated 2019. This had been signed by a previous Prison Director.

145. Custodial staff across the site told us they managed bullying in a variety of ways, including walking around the unit and talking with prisoners, not allowing prisoners into others' cells, managing mixes of gang members, de-escalating incidents early, and turning on their body worn cameras and calling for back-up if de-escalation was unsuccessful.
146. Staff in one unit told us they would also look for behaviour such as a prisoner ordering more canteen items than usual. Staff told us this could be a red flag that the prisoner was being forced to order items for others. They said they would manage this by talking to the prisoner in the first instance to find out more about the situation.
147. Staff in some units told us at the end of each shift they would write a handover email for staff on the next shift to provide information about any issues in the unit that might lead to incidents.
148. During a forum with five custodial staff we heard the lack of programmes, activities and visits increased prisoner tensions.
149. Most prisoners across the site told us they felt safe. Most prisoners told us staff were approachable if there were issues, and that there were consequences for violent behaviour, such as being placed on directed segregation and taken to the Management Unit. Prisoners told us staff generally managed bullying and standovers²² well, usually by moving the alleged bully to a different unit or to a different unlock regime. We observed that the units we visited generally felt calm.
150. A few prisoners told us they had seen bullying occurring, for example, for food, shoes, or nicotine replacement therapy lozenges. A few prisoners told us some custodial staff were better at noticing bullying than others because they spent more time in the wing interacting with prisoners.
151. A few prisoners reported having witnessed or having experienced assaults. One prisoner told us sometimes a prisoner would be walking around with a broken nose and would tell staff they fell in the shower. The prisoner said "who falls in the shower and breaks their nose? It's assault, but staff don't see it."
152. We spoke to a transgender prisoner who said she felt treated with respect. She had an alert in IOMS that she was not to be double-bunked.
153. All prisons in New Zealand have Violence and Aggression Reduction plans as part of Corrections' wider Violence and Aggression Reduction Work Programme. These plans are intended to develop, align, and sequence work between Corrections and staff unions to reduce the impacts of prisoner violence and aggression on custodial staff. We were given a copy of the Rimutaka Prison Violence and Aggression Reduction Plan, and told that it had recently been audited by the Regional Operational Performance Team. The version we were given showed comments from this audit but was not dated. The Prison Director told us during an interview that there was zero tolerance of violence and that this was a focus of the regular Violence and Aggression plan meetings.
154. Most staff we interviewed acknowledged there was a strong focus on safety and security at the site, but did not mention the Violence and Aggression plan. A Principal Corrections

²² Using intimidation or threats to force others into compliance.

Officer in a high security unit told us there was good communication from management about not tolerating violent behaviour. She said the new violence and aggression policy was good and that if prisoners threatened anyone they were “off to the Management Unit”.

155. The Prison Tension Assessment Tool (PTAT) helps custodial staff assess the overall level of tension in a prison unit, which in turn can help them manage the risk of violence. PTAT assessments deliver a tension level of red, amber or green.²³ Assessments are subjective and based on staff observations and interactions with prisoners. Assessments should be completed after unit lock-up, but may be done more often. In the six-month review period, staff across Rimutaka Prison generally completed PTATS as required. The PTATs were mostly green, with one amber in one of the units. There were no red PTATs over the review period. This indicates low levels of tension reported across the prison.
156. The Principal Corrections Officers in two units described how staff made use of the PTAT to gauge the level of tension in the unit. In one high security unit, the Principal Corrections Officer told us staff used the PTAT twice a day.

Prisoner files

Inspection Standards

- A prisoner file management system is in place and used to record all information about that prisoner and confidentiality is maintained.

157. Prisoner files contain personal information about individual prisoners throughout their time in prison. These files are hard copy (paper) and should be stored in lockable, fireproof filing cabinets. File registers should be kept so files can be signed in and out. Electronic files from Corrections’ Integrated Offender Management System (IOMS) also contain significant amounts of prisoner information and should be regularly updated.
158. During our inspection we observed that prisoner files were stored in cabinets in unit guard rooms or in the Principal Corrections Officer’s office. Not all cabinets were fireproof. Many cabinets were unlocked, and there did not appear to be file registers in all units.
159. We checked a sample of hard copy prisoner files across the prison and found that generally these contained relevant and up-to-date documentation. However, some files had paperwork waiting to be filed.
160. We also reviewed a sample of electronic files for prisoners across the site. We found these were generally of an acceptable standard and contained a variety of notes from a range of staff members including custodial staff, case managers, and the Pou Arataki.²⁴ We found custodial officers made regular file notes, usually two or three times a month, recording information about staff interactions with the prisoner, welfare checks, and the prisoner’s behaviour and progress. We observed very detailed and informative file notes from the case management team.

²³ A red rating indicates significantly increased tensions which would require a review and response by the Prison Director

²⁴ A job description on the Corrections intranet sets out that “The Pou Arataki is responsible for the development of support processes that assist the well-being, rehabilitation and effective reintegration of prisoners in the Māori Focus Unit through facilitation and liaison with whānau, hapū and iwi.”

Separation of prisoner categories

Inspection Standards

- Prisoners of different categories are separated, where possible, by allocating them to separate parts of the prison.

161. Prisoners of different categories present different levels of risk to the safety and security of the prison and must therefore be managed in a unit and regime that is consistent with their category. Prisoners of different categories should generally not be mixed. For example, remand accused prisoners should be separated from remand convicted or sentenced prisoners. In some cases, a prison director will apply to a regional commissioner for an exemption to mix different categories of prisoners. Exemptions to mix are generally for the purposes of rehabilitation, education and employment, or to enable sites to ensure prisoners received minimum entitlements such as time out of their cells.
162. At the time of our inspection, the site had an exemption to mix accused and convicted prisoners in high security units. The site had sought the exemption so they could ensure these prisoners received their minimum entitlements (e.g. an hour of exercise in the open air every day). The exemption was dated 12 July 2023, was to continue indefinitely (until formally withdrawn) and was to be reviewed every 12 months or when the SLR roster was lifted. It was signed by the Prison Director, Regional Commissioner, and Chief Custodial Officer.
163. There were some prisoners aged 18 or 19 who were mixing with adult prisoners. The Prison Operations Manual sets out that the Assessment of Placement for Young Adult (APYA) should be completed by trained staff for all prisoners aged 18 or 19 to determine the most suitable placement for them.²⁵ We checked IOMS and found that APYA assessments had been completed for these prisoners who were all identified as suitable for non-youth unit placements.
164. At the time of our inspection Rimutaka Prison had a total of 414 remand prisoners, which represented 55% of the total population at the site. Generally, all prisoners on remand must be managed as high security, but the Corrections Custodial Practice Manual sets out that prisoners with a remand status may be assessed using the Remand Management Tool (RMT) to determine the level of custodial supervision they require.²⁶ Assessing them using the RMT means some prisoners can be safely placed in lower security units and given access to an appropriate regime where they may, for example, be given more time out of their cells and be able to participate in more constructive activities.
165. We observed that staff at Rimutaka Prison were not assessing prisoners using the RMT. It was disappointing that staff we spoke with, including two Principal Corrections Officers, were not aware of the RMT and had not been trained in how to use it.

²⁵ Prison Operations Manual M.03.01 Under 20 years old male prisoners.

²⁶ Custodial Practice Manual – Remand Management Tool (RMT).

Accommodation

Inspection Standards

- The placement of prisoners in shared cells is done after careful consideration of their suitability for associating with one another.
- Trans prisoners are placed in single cells, unless a suitable trans prisoner of the same gender is identified.
- Trans prisoners' safety is assessed before placement in any cell or unit.

166. Corrections staff use the Shared Accommodation Cell Risk Assessment (SACRA) to review the compatibility of prisoners before they are placed in a shared cell.²⁷ The tool does not replace staff judgement, but helps to inform their decision-making and minimise any potential risks. The SACRA identifies key risk factors to consider before placing a prisoner in a shared cell. The assessment captures a range of information about the person, including their age, security classification, offending history, history of imprisonment, gang affiliation, notable physical characteristics, mental health concerns and any other special needs. The SACRA assessments of both prisoners must be compared before deciding to place prisoners in a shared cell.
167. Corrections reports nationally on cell sharing figures. The figures for Rimutaka Prison (dated 30 November 2023) supplied to us by Corrections national office showed that 21% of prisoners at Rimutaka Prison were sharing a cell at that time.
168. A review of COBRA showed staff always completed a SACRA before placing prisoners in a shared cell. This included checking if prisoners had non-association orders. Staff told us they completed the SACRA on the computer and did not interview prisoners to help determine compatibility and assess risk, though they did ask prisoners if they were willing to share a cell.
169. Some prisoners who were sharing a cell told us staff had asked them if they were willing to share before putting a second man in the cell. However, some other prisoners told us they had simply been informed they would be sharing.
170. At the time of our inspection, most units were not housing transgender prisoners. However, we asked Principal Corrections Officers in several units about safely accommodating transgender prisoners. All PCOs we interviewed were able to articulate the correct process for determining risk. All told us they would allocate a single cell to a transgender prisoner and were able to describe the process of developing a support plan and communicating this plan to unit staff.

²⁷ Corrections Regulations, 2005, section 66 allows for prisoners to share cells unless they are deemed unsuited to sharing.

Complaints

Inspection Standards

- Complaints procedures are effective, timely and well understood.
- Staff and prisoners are encouraged to resolve complaints at the lowest level in the first instance; when this is not possible prisoners understand how to make a complaint, and are able to do so easily.
- Prisoners feel safe from repercussions when using complaints procedures and can appeal decisions easily.
- Where a prisoner raises a concern about their safety, these matters are prioritised.

171. Corrections expects prisoners' complaints to be resolved at the lowest level possible. If prisoners wish to make a formal complaint to Corrections, they should be able to make one electronically via a prisoner kiosk, or by completing a paper form (usually a PC.01 form). We note that Corrections has a 'no wrong door' policy regarding complaints. Prisoners should also be able to access telephones or writing materials to make complaints to external oversight agencies such as the Office of the Inspectorate, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Health and Disability Commissioner, and the Human Rights Commission.
172. In the six-month review period, 995 general prisoner complaints were recorded about Rimutaka Prison. The top three categories were property (222 complaints), communications (166 complaints) and 'other' (122 complaints). We noted that most of the complaints categorised as 'other' could have been categorised more accurately as there are sufficient categories and sub-categories in the system. Prisoners also made six complaints to the Chief Executive of Corrections.
173. We note that 995 prisoner complaints in the six-month review period in 2023 is significantly higher than the same six-month period in the previous year, during which only 323 prisoner complaints were recorded. However, two comparable prison sites to Rimutaka Prison (i.e. Spring Hill Corrections Facility and Christchurch Men's Prison) received similar numbers of complaints in the six-month review period in 2023.²⁸
174. In the six-month review period, prisoners also made 94 allegations against staff at Rimutaka Prison which were recorded in the Allegations Against Staff database and managed by the prison using the IR.07 process.²⁹ A review of PC.01 complaint forms for the same period showed an additional five allegations of staff misconduct that should have been referred to the IR.07 process but which were not entered into the Allegations Against Staff database as they should have been.
175. We are aware there may be data collection issues with complaints. For example, prisoner requests for information may be included in complaint numbers. In addition, complaints may be counted more than once. For example, if a prisoner makes an allegation against staff using

²⁸ We have selected these prisons as comparable with Rimutaka Prison because prisoner numbers are similar. However, prisoner demographics are different, so this comparison is provided for context only.

²⁹ All allegations by prisoners of poor staff behaviour should be recorded by staff in the Allegations Against Staff database, and the IR.07 process followed to ensure the allegation is investigated. The Inspectorate is notified of all allegations by prisoners about poor staff behaviour which are recorded in an IR.07. The Inspectorate may decide to monitor the prison's process in dealing with these allegations.

- a PC.01 general complaint form, this may be recorded in both the General Complaints (PC.01) numbers and the Allegations Against Staff (IR.07) numbers.
176. Prison units should display posters explaining how to make complaints and posters that give telephone numbers and other contact information for external oversight agencies such as the Office of the Inspectorate, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Health and Disability Commissioner, and the Human Rights Commission. During the inspection we observed that not all units were displaying these posters.
 177. Most units had a prisoner self-service kiosk in a communal area which meant prisoners could access these when they were unlocked. Prisoners accessed the self-service kiosk using a PIN number and fingerprint. Their fingerprint must be taken by staff at the time of their reception and registered. At the time of the inspection, COBRA figures showed that 97% of the prisoners at Rimutaka Prison had their fingerprints registered on the kiosk system.
 178. We asked prisoners about the complaints process. Most said they knew how to make a complaint by requesting a PC.01 form from staff or by using the prison self-service kiosk.
 179. Several prisoners told us they had not needed to make complaints as staff dealt with issues if they raised them verbally. However, several other prisoners said they did not make complaints as they felt staff did not take complaints seriously and no action would be taken.
 180. Corrections has a 'no wrong door' policy for complaints which means that no matter how a prisoner makes a complaint, it should be responded to. We heard from a few prisoners that they were sometimes advised they had not used the correct process for their complaint and the matter was closed without resolution. This does not align to Corrections' 'no wrong door' policy for making complaints.
 181. We were told the Custodial Systems Manager reported daily on the timeliness of staff management of complaints, and on whether all prisoners were registered on the prisoner self-service kiosks (i.e. so they could make complaints via the kiosks if they wished). The Custodial Systems Manager gave these reports every morning at operational briefings which were attended by the Prison Director and the senior management team. This meant all managers were aware of any issues and could resolve these in their units.
 182. We noted that at the time of the inspection, the prisoner self-service kiosk in the Management Unit was not working and staff were providing paper complaint forms if prisoners requested them. Staff in the unit were unable to tell us the exact length of time the kiosk had been broken but estimated it had been approximately two months. We interviewed one prisoner in this unit who wanted to make an allegation against staff. He told us the kiosk wasn't working and he didn't feel comfortable completing a paper form. The Principal Corrections Officer said they would follow this up with the prisoner.
 183. Only a few prisoners were aware that if they felt their complaint had been treated unfairly, they could escalate it to an external oversight agency. As noted above, not all units were displaying posters with the contact details of these agencies.
 184. In addition, in the six-month review period, there were 47 complaints regarding health services at Rimutaka Prison. The Clinical Inspector reviewed a random selection of ten of these complaints and found that all had been acknowledged within the expected timeframe, and all but one had been responded to within the expected timeframe. All complaint responses had been written in plain language. The health team had taken appropriate action to resolve the complaints.

185. As previously mentioned, in the six-month review period, the Inspectorate received 135 complaints from prisoners at Rimutaka Prison. The three most common complaint categories were Prisoner Property (33 complaints), Prisoner Transfers and Movements (22 complaints), and Health Services (21 complaints).
186. Some prisons hold regular Prison Forums which are attended by prisoner representatives, the Prison Director and senior managers. These forums aim to give prisoners an opportunity to speak directly with senior managers, to raise any issues and make suggestions, and, potentially, to allow the site to manage some issues before they result in complaints. At the time of our inspection, Rimutaka Prison was not holding Prison Forums.

Māori Prisoners

Inspection Standards

- Māori prisoners can access and practise their Māori culture and customs.
- Māori prisoners have access to kaupapa Māori informed and tikanga-based rehabilitation and reintegration programmes that are specifically designed to meet their needs.
- Māori prisoners receive help to access stable whānau support.

187. At the time of our inspection, 426 (57%) of the 752 men at Rimutaka Prison identified as Māori. On the first day of the inspection, the three most common iwi affiliations recorded in COBRA were Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Porou, and Tainui.
188. At the time of our inspection, Rimutaka Prison was offering very limited cultural support to meet the needs of Māori prisoners.
189. We found the site had closed its Māori Focus Unit (previously located in Unit 5) so the Te Tirohanga rehabilitation pathway was no longer running. The Corrections intranet sets out that Te Tirohanga aims to reduce re-offending by providing a rehabilitation pathway founded on a kaupapa Māori therapeutic environment.
190. The prison was offering one rehabilitation programme in Unit 9 (Te Whare Manaakitanga Special Treatment Unit) for men convicted of violent offences. This programme has a cultural component which encompasses Māori culture and te reo Māori. Staff told us there were prisoner-facilitated te reo classes and mentoring between the men in this unit.
191. There were no other cultural programmes (e.g. tikanga programmes) available at the site. Māori men across the prison confirmed this.
192. We interviewed the Pou Arataki³⁰ for the site who told us her biggest concern was the lack of visits as Māori men on site needed whānau support.
193. The Pou Arataki told us she had previously been attached to the Māori Focus Unit in Unit 5, but that she had received an email on 12 December 2022 telling her there was no longer access to the whare. The Pou Arataki had been allowed access to the unit at a later date to

³⁰ A job description on the Corrections intranet sets out that "The Pou Arataki is responsible for the development of support processes that assist the well-being, rehabilitation and effective reintegration of prisoners in the Māori Focus Unit through facilitation and liaison with whānau, hapū and iwi."

photograph the carvings before it was “whakamoe” (put to sleep). She now moved around the site to visit Māori men to make sure they were “culturally okay”.

194. The Pou Arataki told us there had been a proposal to move the whare (i.e. the Māori Focus Unit) to the back of the site but that this would have been disrespectful.
195. She told us she felt the site considered cultural activities to be motivational and therefore not a priority. She disagreed with this view and had recently given a presentation to case managers to raise awareness about the importance of te reo Māori.
196. We interviewed the Volunteer Coordinator for the site who told us there were three Kaiwhakamana³¹ who came on site every week to meet with men across the prison. She said generally if a prisoner wanted to see a Kaiwhakamana, a case manager would send a referral to her. However, she was not currently receiving any referrals from case managers. She was sometimes getting referrals from mental health clinicians and custodial staff. She told us she was in the process of putting posters about Kaiwhakamana into all units to raise awareness.
197. Staff in the Intervention and Support Unit told us a Kaiwhakamana visited the unit regularly and had a calming effect on the prisoners.
198. We spoke with a Kaiwhakamana who had been visiting Unit 10. He told us he visited every Thursday and saw two or three prisoners each time but would see as many as requested by the Volunteer Coordinator. He had no issues with the site regarding relationships or access.
199. The Kaiwhakamana told us he did not currently receive requests for cultural support in the event of a death in custody, though he would provide this if it was requested.

Foreign national prisoners

Inspection Standards

- The specific needs of foreign national prisoners are met, including practical help so they can keep in touch with their families overseas.
- There are prison staff with the skills to communicate with all prisoners on site. Where required, interpreters are provided.

200. Foreign national (non-New Zealand citizen) prisoners should expect to be supported in prison to access their consular representative, if required, and to use an interpreter service if they need it to understand key information. Foreign national prisoners should also have their health, culture, religion, and dietary requirements met.
201. At the time of the inspection, COBRA data showed there were 38 foreign national prisoners at Rimutaka Prison. Nine were from Samoa, eight from Australia and three from Somalia. There were two foreign nationals from India, Iraq, Tonga and the United Kingdom, and one each from Afghanistan, Cambodia, Chile, Croatia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Jamaica, Myanmar, Scotland and South Africa.
202. Corrections has an 0800 telephone number staff can ring 24 hours a day, seven days a week to access interpreter services for prisoners who speak limited English. Staff in the Receiving

³¹ Kaiwhakamana are kaumātua (Māori elders or people of status) who have access to prisons to enable the wellness and well-being of their people. They are not employees of Corrections.

Office were aware of the 0800 number, and we observed a poster regarding this service on display in the Receiving Office. The Senior Corrections Officer in the Receiving Office told us if a non-English speaking person came in, staff would either call other staff at the site who spoke the person's language or ring the interpreter service. However, the Senior Corrections Officer also told us the interpreter service was not available 24-hours a day or at weekends, and so sometimes staff would use Google translate. We checked the Corrections intranet and found it contained conflicting information about the hours of operation for the interpreter service. One intranet page set out that the service was available 24/7 (this is correct) but there was also a link to a Memorandum of Understanding which set out that the service was available Monday to Friday 9am-6pm and Saturday 9am-2pm (this is no longer correct). We have informed Corrections about the conflicting information so they can rectify this.

203. Generally, staff across the site knew to use interpreter services for foreign national prisoners who spoke limited English, or told us they would find another member of staff who spoke the person's language. Some staff told us there was information about contacting an embassy or consulate in the induction information, but some other staff did not mention assisting foreign national prisoners to contact their embassy or consulate.
204. We spoke with several foreign national prisoners across the site. Two of them told us they had not been assisted to contact their embassy or consulate.
205. Most of the foreign national prisoners we spoke with told us staff assisted them to contact their families every week by telephone or video calling. For example, one man had a video call with his family every Sunday for 15 minutes and made a telephone call to another family member for 30 minutes once a week.
206. There was one foreign national prisoner in a high security unit who spoke very limited English. Files notes on IOMS suggested he was unsure why he was in prison. Unit staff reported difficulties in accessing the interpreter service for this man and told us they generally communicated with hand signals. Staff had found an officer from another unit who could speak the man's language and a file note indicated this officer had helped the man to make a telephone call in October 2023. We spoke to the Principal Corrections Officer of the man's unit who told us he contacted the officer who spoke the language if necessary, but that he had not tried to use the interpreter service.

Property

Inspection Standards

- Prisoner's property held in storage is secure, and prisoners can access it on reasonable request.
- Prisoner funds are managed securely and are accounted for.

207. When people enter prison, their personal property is checked, recorded and either given back to them, stored in a property office or disposed of.³² If a prisoner has cash with them, it will be deposited into their prisoner trust account. Prisoners may ask family/whānau to send them authorised personal items (such as additional underwear), which is sorted, checked and registered on individual prisoner property lists by property staff.

³² Department of Corrections Authorised Property Rules (2020) guide what prisoners may keep on arrival, in storage, or what needs to be disposed of. Property rules are authorised by the Corrections Act, 2004, section 45A.

208. At Rimutaka Prison there are two property offices. The main property office, which is used to process, issue and store prisoner property, is in the Receiving Office building inside the prison wire. The external property office is used to check and process mail and is outside the prison wire.
209. We visited the main property office and found it was clean and well organised with ample storage space. We observed that valuables were stored in a lockable cabinet. Other property was stored in plastic crates on lockable concertina shelving. Two full time Property Officers worked there. The Property Officers told us the workload was "heavy" with the increase of the remand population at the prison.
210. The Property Officers told us when property arrives with prisoners from other prisons, they print out a property list, check it against the list in IOMS and note if anything is not there. They told us items often went missing in transit.
211. In 2023, there were 75 claims by prisoners at Rimutaka Prison for lost property. Of these claims 42 (56%) were accepted, to a value of \$30,690. The average claim value was \$409.20. In the previous year there were 41 claims by prisoners at Rimutaka Prison for lost property. Of these claims 25 (61%) were accepted, to a value of \$14,782. The average claim value was \$360.53.
212. Prisoners can request to have stored property issued to them. The Property Officers told us the length of time it took them to get stored property to prisoners could depend on the number of stored property crates a prisoner had. Most prisoners had only one crate, which meant finding the item requested was relatively quick. However, some prisons allowed prisoners to fill several crates with property (for example, one prisoner had six crates) and it could take time to look through multiple crates to find the item the prisoner had requested.
213. The Property Officers told us rules about what property was allowed were not consistent across sites. This meant prisoners were allowed items at some sites that were not allowed to be issued at Rimutaka Prison. When this occurred, they passed the information on to the relevant Principal Corrections Officer of the unit to decide whether to approve the item.
214. We interviewed a number of prisoners across the site about property. Most had no significant issues and told us they could generally access stored property within reasonable timeframes. However, some prisoners told us there were delays in staff processing their property request applications. In addition, there could be delays in property being processed before it was allowed onto the site.
215. Two prisoners told us property often went missing when they were transferred between prisons. The two prisoners told us the rules about what property was allowed varied between prisons. They also said there were inconsistencies across prison units which could be an issue as sometimes one person was allowed an item, but another person requested the same item and the request was declined.
216. As previously mentioned, of the 995 complaints from Rimutaka Prison in the six-month review period, the highest number (222 complaints) were property related. We note that property is commonly the highest category of complaint received from prisons nationwide.
217. The Prison Operations Manual sets out that the maximum balance to be held in a prisoner's trust account is \$200 at any one time, unless approval for a greater amount has been obtained from the Residential Manager.³³ We observed that some prisoners had amounts

³³ POM F.05.01 Prisoner trust account

greatly exceeding \$200 in their trust accounts and were told they had not received approval to hold these funds. We were told the site was addressing this issue.

218. Prisoners we interviewed raised no issues with the management of their trust accounts.

Health

Inspection Standards

- Prisoners have timely access to community-equivalent health and dental services, and receive treatment which is sensitive to their diverse needs from competent staff in an environment that promotes dignity and maintains privacy.
- Prisoners are supported and encouraged to optimise their health and well-being.
- Prisons have a health-care service which ensures professional care of the physical and mental health of prisoners.
- Health files are accurate, up-to-date and confidential, and accompany the prisoner when they are transferred.
- Prisoners have access to specialised external secondary and tertiary health care services when required.
- On reception, prisoners are made aware of the prison health services available and how to access them.
- Prisoners have a right to health confidentiality and do not have to provide information, undergo health interventions or screening.
- Trans prisoners receive health care equivalent to that available to them in the community.

Provision of health care

219. Prisoners are entitled to receive medical treatment that is reasonably necessary and of a standard that is reasonably equivalent to that available to the public.³⁴
220. Prison health services are nurse-led, and at Rimutaka Prison were supported by contracted providers who came on site, including three medical officers (general practitioners), a dentist and a podiatrist. Prisoners were escorted out of the prison to receive other health services, such as optometry, in the community.
221. As previously mentioned, the health team at Rimutaka Prison was significantly short-staffed at the time of the inspection, with only 20.6 FTE registered nurses in the role out of 35.2 FTE budgeted positions. In addition, two of the 20.6 FTE nurses were unavailable to work, so the team had only 18.6 FTE nurses available.
222. We interviewed the Health Centre Manager and one of the two Assistant Health Centre Managers who told us due to the staffing situation they often had to deliver only urgent health services. The Health Centre Manager and Assistant Health Centre Manager described their team as high performing considering the staffing levels. The Health Centre Manager said, "the team pull together and get things done."
223. The Health Centre Manager and the Assistant Health Centre Manager told us that due to the staff shortages in their team they were working "on the floor" as nurses themselves, although they should have been focusing on managerial tasks. They told us they often attended to

³⁴ Corrections Act, 2004, Section 75.

- managerial tasks at the end of the day, having already completed eight hours of clinical work with prisoners.
224. The Health Centre Manager and the Assistant Health Centre Manager told us the Rimutaka Prison population was increasing, but that the number of FTE positions in the health team had not increased (the FTE for the health team at the time of our inspection was 59.2).
 225. As previously mentioned, the prisoner population at Rimutaka Prison had increased from the previous year. At the time of our inspection on 2 December 2023 there were 752 prisoners. At the same time in 2022 there had been 699 prisoners. Moreover, at the time of our inspection there was a higher proportion of prisoners on remand than in the previous year (i.e. 414 prisoners on remand on 2 December 2023 (55%) compared with 358 on remand (51%) on the same date in 2022). We note this is significant as remand prisoners generally have higher health needs.
 226. We note that although the prisoner population at Rimutaka Prison had increased from 2022 to 2023, at the time of our last inspection on 9 October 2017, the prisoner population had been significantly higher with 1,054 prisoners. The FTE for the health team at that time had been 57.8. It should be noted, however, that the proportion of prisoners on remand in 2017 was much lower, with only 263 prisoners (25%) on remand at that time.
 227. The Health Centre Manager and the Assistant Health Centre Manager told us they sometimes received support from health teams from other prisons who would send nurses to cover shifts. However, they told us this was a short-term solution to the long-term problem of an increased onsite population and recruitment difficulties.
 228. The Clinical Inspector spoke with a group of nine nurses who told her the workload was high and that they felt burned out, rushed and unsafe. They appreciated that their managers were supporting them, but felt they just needed more nurses (for more information on the wellbeing of health staff see the Health Staff subsection of the Prison Staff section of this report).
 229. The Health Centre Manager told us nurse clinics had been severely disrupted due to the shortage of nurses, but that prisoners were still having acute health needs met. An electronic review of three nurse clinics confirmed that men were being seen for acute health needs such as burns, vomiting, weight issues, blood tests, visual acuity, and depot injections.³⁵
 230. The Clinical Inspector observed a nurse clinic during the inspection and noted health staff were friendly and treated the men respectfully. It was noted, however, that prisoners' privacy was compromised as the door of the consultation room remained open and two custodial staff stood outside and would have been able to hear all discussions. Staff told us nurses and Medical Officers used their discretion regarding the closing of doors, but that staff safety was paramount.
 231. As previously mentioned, the site had significant custodial staff shortages and regime restrictions which meant many prisoners in the high security part of the prison spent long periods locked in their cells. During interviews, the Health Centre Manager, the Assistant Health Centre Manager and one of the Medical Officers told us this situation meant prisoners had higher health, mental health and medication needs than ever before.
 232. In addition, custodial staff shortages were having an impact on the services provided by the health team. A group of nine nurses told the Clinical Inspector they now had to request

³⁵ A depot injection releases a medication slowly over time to permit the less frequent administration of a medication.

custodial staff to observe consultations in the health centre, and some nurses said they felt unsafe. In addition, the nurses said sometimes, mostly at weekends, it was difficult to do medication rounds because custodial staff were not available to accompany them. They said there was a mismatch between the hours worked by custodial staff and the hours worked by nurses. This could be problematic for medication administration.

233. All the prisoners we interviewed about health services told us they knew how to request to see a member of the health team by completing a health request form.
234. In prisons, the standard practice is for prisoners to put their health request forms into a purpose-built locked box in their unit. Boxes are locked for privacy reasons. Healthcare staff should collect the forms daily and acknowledge receipt within a specified timeframe. We found that at Rimutaka Prison, prisoners in some units were not using this process because there were no locked boxes available. Instead they were either putting their health request forms under the staff office door or giving forms to a custodial officer. Custodial staff would then put the forms in a folder for a member of the health team to collect. The forms were folded for privacy, but confidentiality could not be assured. A purpose-built, locked box should be available in every unit so health requests remain confidential.
235. Despite being short-staffed, we observed that the health team was managing health request forms efficiently. Nurses collected the forms every afternoon and scanned them. The following morning, nurses triaged the forms. They told us all forms were triaged within 24 hours. Our review of electronic health records confirmed this.
236. Prisoners across the site told us nurses were prompt to respond to health request forms. Prisoners told us they were usually seen by a nurse within a day or two of completing a health request form. They were generally positive about the service they received from nurses at the prison.
237. A few prisoners told us sometimes the nurse would come to their cell during medical rounds to talk about a health request form. Some prisoners told us this could be problematic for privacy reasons as other prisoners could overhear the discussion. We observed nurses consulting with prisoners at cell doors in one of the high security units when there were other prisoners nearby (i.e. another prisoner sharing the cell and prisoners in adjoining cells). Some prisoners told us they would be seen in private if they asked the nurse.
238. We visited the prison health centre which was clean and tidy. We observed that equipment was well maintained. Vaccine fridge temperatures were monitored as required. Controlled drug procedures were followed. We noted the medication room was very small and lacked ventilation. Additionally, there was no staffroom, so health staff had to have meal breaks alongside nurses working at computers.

Medical Officers

239. The Regional Clinical Director told us there were three medical officers who supported the prison for 39 hours a week over three clinics a week. They were available on-call out of hours, generally offering telephone advice to nurses. One of the Medical Officers told the Clinical Inspector that wait times for their clinic was approximately four weeks. She said a lot of work was created by the high numbers of prisoners transferred from other prisons.
240. Prisoners across the site told us there were often long delays (for example, weeks or months) to see a medical officer. Prisoners told us they were generally satisfied with the service they got from a medical officer once they had been seen.

- 241. Our electronic review of a Medical Officer clinic during the inspection showed prisoners were generally seen within two to three weeks, though one had waited six weeks. Medications were generally prescribed promptly.
- 242. During an interview, one prisoner told us he had been re-booked for the Medical Officer twice before finally being seen due to a new acute health need seven weeks after his first cancelled appointment.
- 243. The Medical Officer told us it was difficult to provide preventative health interventions due to the workload required to cover the acute need. This was especially so where nurses did the pre-screening for preventative health interventions, as the health team was so short-staffed.
- 244. The Medical Officer and the Regional Clinical Director told us that while relationships with custodial staff were very good, custodial staffing shortages had affected health service provision. Health staff relied on custodial staff to escort prisoners to clinics, but the Medical Officer said there was not always continuous patient flow into clinics.

Access to medication

- 245. Most prisoners we interviewed who were on medication told us they had been able to get their usual medication in a timely manner when they had come into prison.
- 246. A few prisoners raised issues about their access to medication. For example, one man told us he received his sleeping pills at 6pm during the evening medication round and had to take them at that time. This meant he fell asleep early and woke up in the middle of the night.
- 247. Another man told us his medication for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder had been changed when he had arrived in prison. He told us the new medication did not give him the same quality of life as he could not sleep properly. The Clinical Inspector checked the man's health record and found the medication the man had been receiving in the community had not been continued in prison as it was not recommended for long-term use. Therefore, the medical officer had determined the change was clinically indicated.

Dentist

- 248. The dentist had been providing services to Rimutaka Prison for nine years. He was supported by a dental assistant. At the time of the inspection, the service provision was 16 hours a week over two clinics a week. Wait times were around four to five weeks. If men had acute dental issues, medical or nursing staff would triage and treat them (for example, with pain and/or antibiotic medication) until they could be seen by the dentist.
- 249. Prisoners across the site told us there were often long delays (months) to see a dentist.
- 250. We reviewed a dental clinic on 5 December at which 14 prisoners were seen. Most had waited between three to seven weeks, though two had been seen the day after their dentist request and two had waited eight and nine weeks respectively (i.e. this was an average of a five week wait). Our review of the records for the 14 men showed that some were having ongoing treatment, and that once treatment had begun, their appointments had been regular.
- 251. Both the dentist and dental assistant described feeling safe and having a good level of support from custodial staff. However, they also described the service as totally reliant on the availability of custodial staff. If there were custodial staff shortages, they told us the service suffered. The dentist said he was sometimes kept waiting for a patient to arrive, rather than patients waiting ready to attend their appointment.

252. The dentist advised the Clinical Inspector that the equipment was old and in particular the suction unit was over 20 years old and needed replacing. It was pleasing to note that when we followed up after our inspection, the dentist told us it had been replaced.

Physiotherapist

253. At the time of our inspection there had not been a physiotherapist at Rimutaka Prison for over two years though the site was attempting to contract one. When we followed up after our inspection, we were told a physiotherapist had been contracted to provide services to the prison. A later review of the electronic patient management system confirmed this.

High Dependency Unit

254. As previously mentioned, Unit 10 in Rimutaka Prison was divided into two units, Kauri and Rimu. Kauri had 20 cells and Rimu had ten that formed the High Dependency Unit (HDU). The HDU is a national Corrections resource for prisoners with age-related health conditions or complex health and disability needs. Men in the HDU require support for day-to-day activities such as eating or washing. The HDU is the only prison unit of its type in New Zealand.
255. At the time of our inspection, there were 23 men in the HDU. We were informed that at the time the HDU was not accepting more prisoners with age-related health conditions or complex health and disability needs due to health staff shortages.
256. The HDU was staffed by Health Care Assistants (HCAs) who were supervised by a Registered Nurse throughout the day. The nurse was on-call overnight. HCAs supported the men with their day-to-day personal care. All men in the HDU had treatment plans that were reviewed every six months.
257. We visited the HDU and observed that cells had call bells and hospital-style beds that could be raised or lowered if necessary. The unit was very clean and, overall, we observed an improvement in the physical environment of the HDU since our last inspection. Equipment was fit for purpose, areas were free of clutter, and spaces were well configured to support the different needs of the men in the unit.
258. We interviewed several men in the HDU who were very complimentary about the health care they received there. They told us their health needs were met and that both health and custodial staff made extra effort to make sure they were looked after. One man told us prison and health staff had saved his life several times, both in the HDU and in mainstream units.
259. Men in the HDU were particularly complimentary about the care they had received from the Medical Officer.
260. The Clinical Inspector observed a whiteboard in the nurses' office, which clearly indicated which men were for cardio-pulmonary resuscitation should they require it, and which men were not. The Clinical Inspector was told that end-of-life or advance care planning conversations were occurring, which is good practice.
261. Staff in the HDU told us the local Needs Assessment Service Coordination Service (NASC) was responsive and assessed men who were coming up for release or who were being considered for compassionate release, to support them into appropriate placements in the community. We were told that finding community placements for disabled and older prisoners was an ongoing challenge due to concerns regarding their offending histories regardless of their release status.

Substance abuse

Inspection Standards

- Prisoners with a history of substance abuse receive specialised and individualised treatment and culturally appropriate support (including aftercare).

262. Prisoners should be assessed for alcohol and other drug dependencies by health staff or case managers using the Alcohol, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST), which helps staff to determine which programme could be useful for prisoners.
263. The Assistant Health Centre Manager at Rimutaka Prison told us the ASSIST was either done in the community before the person arrived in prison or was completed by a case manager if required.
264. The Assistant Health Centre Manager also told us chronic alcohol or drug use could be treated in a Drug Treatment Unit. We noted that although there was no Drug Treatment Programme occurring at Rimutaka Prison at the time of our inspection, case managers could refer prisoners to other Drug Treatment Units in prisons nationwide.
265. We checked the COBRA data for the review period and found that 128 ASSIST assessments had been completed. Of the 128 assessments, 65 prisoners (51%) were identified as having high risk substance use.
266. The Reception Health Screen includes questions about substance abuse and withdrawal on reception into prison. If a nurse suspects a prisoner is withdrawing or the prisoner says they are experiencing withdrawal symptoms, the nurse undertakes assessments such as the Clinical Opiate Withdrawal Scale (COWS)³⁶ or the Clinical Institute Withdrawal Assessment Scale (CIWA).³⁷ While visiting the Receiving Office during the inspection, the Clinical Inspector did not observe anyone who required an assessment for withdrawal, but a review of a sample of electronic Reception Health Screens showed that nurses were asking men about drug and alcohol use and withdrawal if this was indicated.
267. The Assistant Health Centre Manager told us if a nurse identified a prisoner at reception who might be withdrawing from alcohol or drugs, they would create an appropriate care and management plan. The Assistant Health Centre Manager told us the health team used the Matua Raki guidelines³⁸ to guide care planning.
268. Men who are already engaged with a Community Drug and Alcohol Service (CADS) team can continue to receive this service in prison. The receiving nurse will advise the service by telephone that the person is now in prison. The Assistant Health Centre Manager told us the Medical Officer can also refer men to CADS. Additionally, the Medical Officer may seek advice from the service regarding treatment and medication changes.
269. At the time of our inspection the Assistant Health Centre Manager identified that there were two prisoners receiving opioid substitution treatment (i.e. methadone/suboxone). The

³⁶ COWS can be used in both inpatient and outpatient settings and is administered by a clinician. It rates common signs and symptoms of opiate withdrawal over time.

³⁷ CIWA can be used to assess alcohol withdrawal severity.

³⁸ The Assistant Health Centre Manager was referring to the Substance Withdrawal Management Guidelines (2019), published by New Zealand's mental health and addictions best practice and workforce development centre, Te Pou, formerly known as Matua Raki, the National Addiction Workforce Development Centre.

Assistant Health Centre Manager told us the CADS team would visit people on an opioid substitution treatment programme as required.

270. When reviewing the clinical care of the two men on the opioid substitution programme, the Clinical Inspector noted good liaison between the prison and the CADS team. Appropriate clinical recalls were in place for the men while they were in prison, and release planning in terms of opioid treatment was evident.

Mental health care

Inspection Standards

- Prisoners with mental health needs are identified promptly and supported by community-equivalent services to optimise their well-being during their time in prison and on release.
- Prisoners at risk are appropriately located in a therapeutic environment and supported by trained staff who are resourced to meet their individual needs.
- Trans prisoners are able to access support or counselling services where needed, including external support networks.

271. Prisoners at Rimutaka Prison could access primary mental health care through nurses and medical officers. An Improving Mental Health Service was available to support prisoners with mild to moderate mental health needs. Those with moderate to serious needs could be assessed and treated by members of the prison's Intervention and Support Practice Team (ISPT), though we note the ISPT was significantly understaffed (see Intervention and Support subsection of this report below). Secondary mental health services were provided by Health New Zealand/Te Whatu Ora's Regional Forensic Mental Health Service.
272. As part of the reception process, all prisoners should be screened by a nurse for mental health needs and risk of self-harm. They may be referred for further assessment or treatment if needed. As previously mentioned, prisoners at Rimutaka Prison were receiving the Reception Health Screen, and nurses were asking mental health related questions.
273. Under certain circumstances, or if custodial staff believe a prisoner's risk of self-harm may have changed, they should complete the Review Risk Assessment.³⁹ Corrections' Prison Operations Manual sets out that the purpose of the Review Risk Assessment is "to target specific times or circumstances that could cause a prisoner's level of risk [of self-harm] to change".
274. We reviewed incident reports, use of force registers and directed segregation registers and examined a sample of 41 instances during the review period where a Review Risk Assessment should have been carried out due to the circumstances. Staff did complete a Review Risk Assessment in 28 of the 41 cases, and appropriately moved the prisoner to the Intervention and Support Unit if they were found to be at risk. However, there were 13 instances where custodial staff should have completed the Review Risk Assessment but did not.
275. We reviewed the sample of 28 Review Risk Assessments completed by custodial staff across the review period. We found some variety in the quality of these assessments. For example, while some assessments contained specific comments about the person being assessed, some gave no reasoning or observations for the outcome, and answered questions with a

³⁹ Prison Operations Manual M.05.02 Review Risk Assessment.

yes or no or a generic response such as “prisoner was interviewed and declined any thoughts of self-harm”. In addition, when completing a Review Risk Assessment, Corrections Officers are supposed to consult with a more senior officer or a member of health staff, but we found several instances where this had not occurred. Instead, custodial staff had consulted with an officer of the same rank, or they had entered their own name as the person they had consulted with.

276. We also noted that some of the Review Risk Assessments had been completed following a Use of Force. These required a nurse to assess the prisoner for risk of self-harm, but some did not state if this had occurred.
277. We spoke to several prisoners across the site about their mental health and the standard of care they felt they had received. We heard varied reports from them.
278. Several prisoners in the high security part of the prison told us the lack of time out of their cells was having a negative impact on their mental health.
279. One man in a high security unit told us he had attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and that being locked in his cell for long periods made it difficult to manage his condition and increased his anxiety. The Clinical Inspector found that this man had been seen by a Medical Officer and referred to the Forensic Mental Health team for consideration of re-starting ADHD medication. We observed that according to his health record, the man had waited over seven weeks for his Medical Officer appointment.
280. One prisoner in the Management Unit told us when he told custodial staff he needed to talk to “someone from mental health” he was seen that day. He felt able to ask staff for help.
281. One prisoner told us the nurses “noticed if your mental health is changing”. This prisoner told us the nurses were kind and treated them well when they “were at crisis point”. Another prisoner said the whole health team “did a thankless job and needed to be given thanks a lot more”.
282. Two people we interviewed mentioned the “rainbow nurse” who was a nurse prisoners could approach about issues relating to gender and sexuality. These prisoners told us they appreciated this nurse’s specialty, and that the nurse was compassionate and welcoming. The prisoners told us other prisoners also sought out this nurse due to their inclusivity and speciality in gender diversity. The Clinical Inspector spoke with the rainbow nurse, who showed us some training they had developed for the wider health team.

The Improving Mental Health Service

283. At the time of our inspection, the Improving Mental Health (IMH) Service employed 1.8 FTE clinicians at Rimutaka Prison. This service could provide up to 20 counselling sessions to each prisoner with mild to moderate mental health needs. The waitlist for this service was four months.
284. We interviewed the IMH Service Manager and one of the IMH clinicians. The IMH Service Manager told us the service was relied on much more, particularly now the Drug Treatment Unit had closed.⁴⁰ They described the IMH clinicians as extremely resilient given their caseload numbers and the level of need of the men. The Manager described the biggest

⁴⁰ Figures from COBRA confirmed the Drug Treatment Programme had not been running at Rimutaka Prison for at least six months.

challenges as being the large number of referrals, the small number of staff, the long waitlist, and the mental health of the men deteriorating as they waited for the service.

285. The IMH clinician told us some men were too unwell to be seen by their service, but were declined by the Forensic Mental Health Service and not able to be seen by the Intervention and Support Practice Team (ISPT) in their current model. At the time of our inspection the ISPT was significantly short-staffed and therefore could only assess and treat men in the Intervention and Support Unit and the Management Unit.
286. The majority of the IMH clinicians' work was in the high security units. They told us this made access to the men challenging as they required several custodial staff to escort them to appointments.
287. Another challenge identified by the IMH Service Manager was that men were sometimes transferred to another prison while they were having therapy. Therapy did not necessarily continue at the new prison, and they sometimes needed to go back onto a waiting list. This was not conducive to their mental wellbeing.
288. The IMH Service Manager and the IMH clinician told us they had an excellent relationship with the health team, especially health leaders who assisted them to access clients in the health centre.
289. During the inspection, it was pleasing to observe that men were receiving their treatment from the IMH clinician in a room with the door shut, enhancing privacy.

The Intervention and Support Unit / Intervention and Support Practice Team

290. Rimutaka Prison has an Intervention and Support Unit (ISU) with 24 cells for prisoners assessed as being at risk of self-harm or with acute mental distress. Prisoners withdrawing from substances or suspected of internal concealment may also be housed temporarily in the ISU.
291. Prisoners in the ISU who had mental health needs could access assessment and treatment from the prison's Intervention and Support Practice Team (ISPT), though at the time of our inspection the ISPT was significantly short-staffed. The team has ten roles (i.e. eight FTE clinicians, one FTE Kairuruku Hinengaro (Māori Mental Health Practitioner) and an Assistant Clinical Manager), but only four staff were in place: three clinicians and the Assistant Clinical Manager. The clinicians were two Clinical Nurse Specialists and a Psychologist with a focus on trauma. There was an Acting Clinical Manager and a full time Administration Officer in place for the team.
292. ISPTs generally provide services to prisoners with moderate to severe mental health issues across a prison site, but due to the ISPT staffing situation at Rimutaka Prison, the ISPT could only offer services to prisoners in the ISU, and limited support to some men in the Management Unit.
293. We interviewed the Acting Clinical Manager of the ISPT who told us they hoped the team could work across the site in the future to support men in the ISU, transitioning out of the ISU to a mainstream unit, and to prevent men entering the ISU. However, this approach was not able to occur with the current staffing levels.
294. COBRA figures showed there were nine men in the ISU on the first day of our inspection. A tenth man was moved into the ISU later that day.

295. A review by the Clinical Inspector showed five of the ten men in the ISU at the time of the inspection were on the caseload of the Forensic Mental Health Service team.
296. A review by the Clinical Inspector showed that none of the prisoners in the ISU at the time of the inspection were awaiting admission to a mental health facility for inpatient treatment. However, we heard there could be long waiting lists for prisoners with severe mental health issues to gain access to forensic mental health facilities.
297. Prisoners in the ISU were monitored daily, or as required, by health staff. A review by the Clinical Inspector found that all prisoners in the ISU on the first day of our inspection had received a daily welfare check by a nurse. The Clinical Inspector interviewed two of these prisoners who confirmed they received daily welfare checks.
298. We interviewed the ISPT clinicians who spoke enthusiastically about the potential of the service and who were clearly committed to their roles and the people on their caseloads. They told us they used a trauma-informed lens and a te ao Māori world view as a large number of the people they worked with were Māori. However, one clinician said, "What we do and what we would like to do are two different things".
299. They said they relied on custodial staff to unlock men and escort them to appointments, which could be problematic at times due to custodial staff shortages. The same issue was identified by the IMH and forensic services staff.
300. The ISPT held multi-disciplinary team meetings every Thursday during which they discussed treatment and care plans, exit planning and the day-to-day management of people in the ISU. These meetings were attended by ISPT members, custodial and health staff, and members of the Forensic Mental Health Services team. Meeting minutes were taken by the administrator. This meeting appeared to facilitate meaningful discussion between clinical and custodial staff regarding prisoners' safety plans and safe transition back out of the ISU.
301. Secondary mental health services were available to prisoners from Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora's Regional Forensic Mental Health Service which provides specialist clinical care for people experiencing moderate to severe mental illness. This service was accessed by referral from the health team only. The forensic mental health resource available to Rimutaka Prison at the time of the inspection was one Consultant Psychiatrist, a Forensic Psychologist a Clinical Nurse Specialist and two Prison Liaison Nurses.
302. We met with the forensic liaison nurses who described an excellent working relationship with the health leadership team. They said that finding space to interview patients was a challenge as there were no purpose-built interview rooms, and at times custodial officers would open the door during a consultation to advise the nurse that the room was needed. They also said they had noticed a variety of attitudes towards people with mental health issues from custodial staff, and that they had provided some training which had improved attitudes.
303. The forensic liaison nurses told the Clinical Inspector they felt that the ISPT's mandate was not clear, which made the value of the ISPT service less tangible than that of the IMH and forensic services.
304. Prisoners who had acute or severe long-term mental health conditions were generally accommodated in the ISU until placement at a secure forensic facility was available. We were told there were always challenges with the availability of beds in these facilities, meaning that very mentally unwell men often stayed longer than they should in the prison environment.

305. We spoke to a few prisoners about the standard of care they were receiving or had received in the ISU. One prisoner told us nurses came around every morning to check on his wellbeing, and that other staff would check on him at breakfast, lunch and dinner.
306. Two prisoners who had been in the ISU "many times", and one of whom who had a significant history of self-harming, told us they felt being in the ISU exacerbated their mental health difficulties as the environment was so restrictive. One told us that coming to the ISU felt like a form of punishment.
307. One prisoner who had been to the ISU several times told us staff in mainstream prison units were not trained in mental health. This prisoner told us when they were in the ISU they wanted a voice at the multi-disciplinary team meetings that were held to discuss their care. However, currently this prisoner felt decisions were made without them.
308. Prisoners in the ISU were generally put into an anti-ligature gown on arrival in the unit if they had been assessed as being at risk of self-harm. They would be given ordinary prison clothing to wear once a multi-disciplinary team had agreed it was safe to do so. The Principal Corrections Officer told us it was rare for them to take underwear away from prisoners and that they would only do so in consultation with health staff.

The ISU physical environment

309. The ISU was generally clean and tidy. There were no televisions in cells, and we observed most prisoners had little to do which we do not consider conducive to a therapeutic environment.
310. Toilets in cells had privacy screens and custodial staff in central control confirmed that pixelation of CCTV footage of toilet areas had been turned on two days before our visit. We visited central control and observed that this was the case.
311. There were two dayrooms in the ISU. We inspected one dayroom which contained a television, tables, chairs and a blackboard (see image 3 in Appendix A).
312. For more information on the ISU physical environment, please see the Residential Units subsection in the Environment section of this report.

Prisoners with disabilities

Inspection Standards

- Prisoners with physical, mental or other disabilities have full and effective access to prison life on an equitable basis.⁴¹
- Prisoners with a disability or age-related needs are placed in a cell that is suitable and appropriate for their health-related needs.⁴²
- Those who should not be detained in prison due to severe mental health disabilities are promptly referred to mental health facilities.⁴³

⁴¹ Note, this is a basic principle – not a standard.

⁴² Note, this is an indicator – not a standard.

⁴³ Note, this is an indicator – not a standard.

313. The Ministry of Health definition of disability is that it is any self-perceived limitation in activity resulting from a long-term condition or health problem. This can be physical, mental or emotional. Information about disabilities is stored in prisoners' health records, which can only be accessed by health staff. Health staff should put a health alert in IOMS if custodial staff require this information to manage the person safely.
314. The majority of disabled prisoners at Rimutaka Prison were accommodated in the HDU as it had been refurbished for disabled and older prisoners. For more information on this unit, see the High Dependency Unit subsection in the Provision of Health Care section of this report. See also the Environment, Residential Unit section.
315. We noted that several mainstream units we inspected had special cells which were wheelchair accessible. These cells were slightly larger than regular cells and were in good repair. They had handrails by the toilet, shower and bed. At the time of our inspection these cells were occupied by able-bodied prisoners as there were no prisoners with disabilities in these units.
316. At the time of our inspection there were 53 prisoners aged 60 or over at Rimutaka Prison. Twenty-seven of the 53 men were aged 70 or above (i.e. 17 were aged 70 – 79, and 10 were aged 80 – 89). Eighteen of the 27 men aged 70 or above were located in the HDU.
317. Prisoners aged over 65 are supposed to receive a comprehensive annual health review. We reviewed the electronic health records for a sample of men over 65 at Rimutaka Prison and found that most were already engaging regularly with the health service and therefore did not require a formal annual health review. These men were receiving vaccines targeted at the over-65 age group, such as the shingles vaccine.

Environment

Inspection Standards

- Prisoners live in a clean and suitable environment which is in a good state of repair and fit for purpose.
- Prisoners have sufficient bedding that is laundered regularly.

Residential Units

318. Rimutaka Prison had numerous residential units in use at the time of our inspection. In summary, these were:
- » 14 high security units (HM1 to HM14), each containing 30 cells, some of which accommodated two men.
 - » Five low security units: Unit 4, Unit 7, Unit 8, Unit 9 and Unit 10 (the High Dependency Unit).
 - » The Management Unit and the Intervention and Support Unit. Men were generally accommodated in these units for limited periods of time before being taken back to their 'home' units.

High Security Units

319. We found cells and communal areas in the high security units were clean and tidy and in good states of repair. We observed some general wear and tear in these units, including small amounts of graffiti scratched into paintwork or windows (see images 4 and 5 in Appendix A).
320. We observed that prisoners in the high security units had clean mattresses and sufficient bedding which was laundered regularly. Prisoners we interviewed confirmed this. Some men had thick new mattresses, while others were using two older thinner mattresses. We were told the site was in the process of replacing the old mattresses.
321. Not all the cell toilets in the high security units had covers although men in these units ate in their cells.
322. Some men in high security units reported poor ventilation in their cells, which they told us steamed up when they used the shower.
323. We observed large industrial fans on the landings in the high security units. These were being used for extra cooling as it was summer, and temperatures were high.
324. Generally, the high security units had basic shared facilities that included working self-service kiosks and prisoner telephones. There were communal kitchenettes in the high security units where men could get hot water, but we observed these kitchenettes contained none of the small appliances such as microwaves, toasters or sandwich presses, that would typically be kept in a unit kitchenette.
325. We observed the high security unit exercise yards were mostly clean (see image 6 in Appendix A) but some showed wear and tear with graffiti or scratched paintwork. Some exercise yards had mould or algae growing on the concrete, generally around the toilets and seating areas. Toilets in exercise yards had privacy screens.

- 326. In one of the high security exercise yards we visited, we found there was no area to shelter from the weather (see image 7 in Appendix A).
- 327. We observed some of the non-contact interview rooms in the high security units were dirty, with rubbish on the floor and grimy desks. These rooms often did not have chair for the prisoner.
- 328. Staff in one of the high security units reported that from time to time the security cameras became soiled with bird excrement.

Low security units

- 329. These units featured cells arranged around large grass and concrete compounds. We observed that cells and communal areas in these units were generally clean and tidy and fit for purpose. These units tended to be older and there was some wear and tear including scratched paintwork or windows (see image 8 in Appendix A). Compound areas were tidy and well-maintained (see image 9 in Appendix A).
- 330. We observed that prisoners in these units had clean mattresses and sufficient bedding which was laundered regularly. Prisoners we interviewed confirmed this.
- 331. These units had shared facilities including working self-service kiosks and prisoner telephones, unit kitchenettes and communal dining areas. Prisoners in some of these units had access to small unit gyms which we observed were well equipped.
- 332. We interviewed the Senior Site Manager of Downers, who provide asset and facilities management services to Rimutaka Prison. One of his main concerns was the rusting of underground services in Unit 8. He told us this could potentially lead to the loss of heating which would mean the unit could not be used.

Management Unit

- 333. The Management Unit was tidy, but we observed some graffiti in cells. Staff told us they monitored this and if they observed new graffiti they charged the prisoner and got them to clean it (see image 10 in Appendix A).
- 334. Staff told us there was a policy that mattresses were replaced when they had been in use for longer than 12 months.
- 335. At the time of our inspection, men were using the exercise yard in the Separates area as there was building work occurring in the main exercise yard in the unit. There was graffiti in the Separates area exercise yard and the Principal Corrections Officer told us there was a plan in place for a prisoner to sand the walls and paint them.
- 336. The building work in the main exercise yard was to create two smaller yards. Staff told us this would enable them to offer more prisoners the opportunity to have time out of their cells. Staff told us that currently they found the regime restrictive and time intensive when they had high numbers of prisoners in the unit. They told us this impacted on their ability to offer prisoners time out of their cells.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Following the inspection, the Department have advised us that the Rimutaka Prison Management Unit Yards Enhancement Project was completed in December 2023. The project divided an existing yard into two equal sized yards and installed a toilet, telephone, seating and fixed exercise equipment.

Intervention and Support Unit (ISU)

- 337. The ISU was clean and tidy. There were no televisions in cells and we observed that most prisoners had little to do.
- 338. Toilets in cells had privacy screens and custodial staff in central control confirmed that pixelation of CCTV footage of toilet areas had been turned on two days before our visit.
- 339. Staff and prisoners told us it could get very cold in the ISU. Staff told us the issue arose as a result of generator testing by a contractor when the system was not reset after the testing. Staff said they had to log a job every time the system was tested. If they did not log the job, the heating in the ISU would stay off. Staff told us they gave prisoners extra blankets to stay warm. Prisoners in the ISU told us they would sometimes have to stay in bed under their blankets to stay warm.
- 340. Staff told us there were two dayrooms in the ISU. We inspected one dayroom which contained a television, tables, chairs and bean-bags and a blackboard.
- 341. There were five exercise yards in the ISU. One of the yards we inspected contained a table and chair and a toilet with a privacy screen. There was algae growing on the concrete around the toilet area which needed pressure washing.

High Dependency Unit (Unit 10)

- 342. The High Dependency Unit (HDU) accommodates prisoners with age-related health conditions or complex health and disability needs. It was very clean. Cells had call bells and hospital-style beds that could be raised or lowered if necessary. Some cells were equipped with hoists to assist when moving people. Additional equipment such as mobile toilets was also available. There were toilets and showers in the cells.
- 343. Cell doors were painted different colours for ease of recognition (see image 11 in Appendix A). Cell doors were kept unlocked during the day so prisoners could move around the unit as they wished. Corridors were fitted with handrails and were extra wide to allow for wheelchair and walker access.
- 344. We inspected the communal dayroom/dining room which contained tables and chairs, armchairs, a television, a shelf of books, and a fish tank. The temperature in the room was very warm and staff and prisoners told us it could get hot from the sun. Staff told us they had requested blinds to block out the sun in summer.
- 345. There was an outdoor concrete area with seating and shade cloths (see image 12 in Appendix A). The outdoor area contained a few pot plants and had a view through a wire mesh fence to a grassy garden area. The unit kept a pet rabbit named Ronnie in this communal area.
- 346. Unit 10 Rimu also had ten cells (cells 31 – 40) set around a small open-air compound. At the time of our inspection these cells housed ten men who were waitlisted to relocate to the internal Self Care Unit which was not in use. We found the cells were clean and tidy, and toilets in cells had lids. There was a shower block with four showers; each shower had a privacy screen. The compound was well-maintained and there was a kitchenette with hot and cold water, a toaster, microwave, and sandwich press. The communal dayroom/dining room was clean and furnished with a large dining table, couches, a pool table, and small library area. There was also a small unit gym with a range of equipment.

Hygiene

Inspection Standards

- Prisoners are encouraged to keep themselves clean and are provided with the appropriate toiletries.

347. Prisoners we spoke with across the site told us they had access to showers and to a supply of free toiletries including toilet paper, soap and shampoo.
348. One prisoner told us he was a kitchen worker and often started at 6am and finished at 6pm. Final lock-up in his unit was around 6.30pm. Since his unit had communal showers, the prisoner told us these timings meant sometimes he did not have time for a shower when he returned from work. This issue was raised with unit staff who told us they would ensure prisoners who returned late from work would be able to shower before lock-up.
349. Prisoners across the site told us they had access to shaving equipment, nail clippers and hair clippers.
350. In some units, prisoners told us they were allowed to give each other haircuts. We observed this occurring.
351. Prisoners in certain units, including the high security units and the Management Unit, were issued disposable safety razors unless they had an authorised electric razor.⁴⁵ We asked seven prisoners in these units about their access to razors. They told us they were given razors two to four times a week, mostly when they were locked in their cells, and that razors were collected before they were unlocked.
352. Prisoners in the ISU had access to shampoo and soap. They did not have access to razors with blades, but could request the use of an electric shaver and hair clippers.
353. In the High Dependency Unit, Health Care Assistants helped prisoners to shower, shave and cut their hair and nails. We observed this occurring when we visited the unit.
354. A transgender prisoner told us she had access to limited makeup items (i.e. mascara) through the P119 canteen process. She would have liked to be able to access other makeup items, but these were not available.
355. All prisoners we spoke to had access to cleaning products and equipment to keep their cells clean.
356. We observed that communal areas in units were clean. Cleaning was generally completed by prisoners.

⁴⁵ Prison Operations Manual F.06 Disposable safety razor - These procedures apply only to prisoners accommodated in maximum security units, high security units, and remand or youth units.

Clothing

Inspection Standards

- Prisoners have adequate access to a variety of clean clothing, including underwear and footwear, which is seasonally appropriate and of the right size and quality.

357. All prisoners at Rimutaka Prison wore prison issued clothing. They were issued two sets of clothing (i.e. two pairs of trackpants, two pairs of shorts, two t-shirts, two sweatshirts) at reception. Some prisoners wore items such as socks and underwear that had been supplied by their family/whānau.
358. We observed that prisoners across the site wore clothing that was clean, an appropriate size, and in good repair. Prisoners generally had no complaints regarding clothing. They reported being given two sets of appropriately sized clothing as per Corrections policy.
359. There was a well-stocked central kit locker in the Receiving Office. Prisoners and staff told us prisoners could request replacement clothing from this kit locker via unit staff. The Receiving Office would then send a complete new set of clothing.
360. Prisoners could request footwear (for example, jandals), socks and underwear from the kit locker if they did not have access to these.
361. Units had their own laundries and prisoners told us they could get their clothes laundered regularly. The Receiving Office also had a washing machine and dryer to ensure prisoners had clean clothes for court or release.
362. As previously mentioned, prisoners in the ISU were generally put into an anti-ligature gown on arrival in the unit if they had been assessed as being at risk of self-harm. They would be given ordinary prison clothing to wear once a multi-disciplinary team had agreed it was safe to do so. The Principal Corrections Officer of the unit told us it was rare for them to take underwear away from prisoners and that they would only do so in consultation with health staff.

Food

Inspection Standards

- Prisoners have a varied, healthy and balanced diet which meets their individual needs.
- Upon request, the prison provides meals and food in line with religious, cultural and other special dietary requirements.
- Prisoners' food and meals are stored, prepared and served in line with hygiene regulations.
- Clean drinking water shall be available to every prisoner.
- Mealtimes are reasonable and generally match those in the community, where possible.

363. Prisoners are generally served the same national menu across all Corrections' prisons, with standard and vegetarian options available. Prisoners with specific health or religious needs are also catered for.
364. At Rimutaka Prison we observed that the national menu was being adhered to and that meals generally looked acceptable (see image 13 in Appendix A). Food was typically cereal, toast and a hot drink for breakfast, sandwiches and fruit for lunch, a hot meal for dinner, and a light snack of a muffin and yoghurt for supper.
365. We observed that some of the sandwiches for lunch (i.e. four slices of bread per prisoner) contained very little salad or fillings.
366. Meals were prepared in the prison kitchen by prisoners working under the supervision of instructors. We observed that the kitchen was clean, hygienic and well-organised, and that staff supervised the serving line to ensure all portions were the same.
367. Generally, men in the high security units ate in their cells. We observed meal trolleys arriving in some high security units and saw that special diets were clearly labelled. Staff checked the meals to ensure all special diets had been received as required and that there were enough meals for everyone. Prisoner unit workers then delivered meals to men who ate in their cells. Staff generally supervised the delivery of meals from a distance and did not check off names to ensure all men were given a meal. We observed that this practice led to instances where there were not enough meals for all prisoners in the unit as the unit workers gave some men more than one meal.
368. Prisoners in the low security units had the option of eating in their cells or in communal dining areas in each unit.
369. In Unit 10 (the High Dependency Unit) a Health Care Assistant helped prisoners to eat if they required assistance.
370. The timing of meals was generally acceptable, though some meals were delivered rather early. Breakfast was delivered between 6.30 – 7.30 am, lunch around 11 – 11.30 am, and dinner between 4 – 5pm.
371. All prisoners had access to clean cold drinking water.
372. Most prisoners across the site generally had no issues with the food, though a few said the portion sizes could be larger. A few prisoners told us there were particular meals, for example a pasta meal served for dinner, that they disliked and did not eat.
373. Prisoners across New Zealand can order additional food, such as noodles, biscuits and fruit, through the prison canteen. They must pay for these items themselves with money from their trust accounts. Some prisoners at Rimutaka Prison told us that to feel full they had to order additional food through the canteen.

Good Order

Security

Inspection Standards

- Prisoners are held in a safe environment where security is proportionate to risk and not unnecessarily restrictive.

374. We observed that security features across the site were in good order. The Security Manager told us some CCTV cameras had been upgraded recently and more upgrades were planned. Contractors Honeywell and Downer were undertaking regular checks and maintenance of the perimeter fence and cameras.
375. We observed that all staff and visitors entered through a single gatehouse that contained a visitors' book that staff ensured visitors signed, an APPE⁴⁶ card check, a walk-through metal detector, and an x-ray machine for scanning bags and belongings. We observed that if the metal detector alarm was activated, staff would use a hand-held scanner to check the person more thoroughly.
376. We observed gatehouse staff checking staff members' bags and belongings and found the quality of these checks varied. We observed that at times staff performed thorough checks. However, on occasions there was only one member of staff present which meant they had to perform multiple tasks and this compromised the thorough checking of items as they went through the x-ray machine.
377. There were two sallyports for vehicles entering and leaving the site. One sallyport was used daily and the second was used only in emergencies. There was a minimum of two staff working in the sallyport at any one time. We observed staff conducting thorough checks of vehicles and people entering and leaving the site, including checking contractors' APPE cards. Staff also checked contractors' tool lists against the physical tools they were bringing in. Staff kept vehicle logs to record vehicles entering and leaving the prison.
378. Inside the prison we observed that prisoners were generally held in environments where security features were proportionate to risk and not unnecessarily restrictive. For example, where appropriate, prisoners had access to unit kitchenettes and communal areas. All remand prisoners were held in high security units.
379. We were pleased to observe that following the Office of the Inspectorate raising concerns to the site, staff in the Management Unit were no longer using the slot-pin method for handcuffing prisoners prior removing the prisoner from their cell. Earlier in the review period staff had been handcuffing some prisoners in the Management Unit using the following method: Staff opened a slot in the cell door. The prisoner was instructed to put his hands behind his back and through the slot. Staff applied the handcuffs and attached them to a metal pin in the door. The door was then opened, with the prisoner moving backwards with the handcuffs still attached to the door by the pin. Staff took the prisoner's elbows, and removed the pin so they could escort the prisoner wherever he had to go. This process had been introduced locally and subsequently stopped, pending further review.

⁴⁶ The Authorised Provider Prison Entry (APPE) system is an electronic prison entry system that streamlines the process of entry into prisons for volunteers and non-departmental staff.

380. As in every prison in New Zealand, prisoner telephones and mail at Rimutaka Prison were monitored for the purpose of detecting offences that involved prisoners.
381. Rimutaka Prison had a dog detection team based at the site. The dog team checked incoming mail and property every day for contraband, conducted daily searches of the prison perimeter and weekly searches of various areas inside the prison. In addition, at various times during the week, the dog team conducted vehicle checkpoints in the prison carpark alongside members of the Site Emergency Response Team (SERT). The dog team also undertook targeted searches based on information received from site management, the SERT, or the site Intelligence Team.
382. The Security Manager told us the SERT and the dog detector team performed regular searches throughout the week of the site and vehicles in the prison carpark and recorded their checks.
383. There is an Intelligence Team at Rimutaka Prison that reports to the Manager Regional Intelligence. As part of the inspection we interviewed the three members of the team, including an Intelligence Officer and an Intelligence Analyst. They told us the two main issues at the site were contraband (especially mobile phones) and organised crime investigations. In the six-month review period there had been three organised crime investigations that had included Rimutaka Prison; all investigations had involved the international importation of drugs. The Intelligence Team also told us there could be issues with gambling and the trading of nicotine replacement lozenges.

Classification and placement

Inspection Standards

- Classification, placement and treatment are based on an individual assessment of each prisoner's risks and needs.
- Prisoners are held in the appropriate security conditions and can seek review about decisions on their security classification.
- Trans prisoners are placed in single cells, unless a suitable trans prisoner of the same gender is identified.
- Trans prisoners' safety is assessed before placement in any cell or unit.

384. The Prison Operations Manual sets out that all sentenced prisoners should be assigned a security classification which reflects the level of risk they pose while inside or outside prison.⁴⁷ Initial security classification is assigned within 14 days of a prisoner receiving a sentence of imprisonment and every security classification is reviewed at least once every six months during a prisoner's sentence, except for those assigned a classification of minimum security.
385. We reviewed the COBRA data for the 92 initial security classifications assigned in the six-month review period. All but one (99%) had been assigned within the required timeframe.
386. We reviewed the COBRA data for the 231 security classification reviews completed in the six-month review period. Two-hundred-and-twelve (92%) had been completed within the required timeframe.

⁴⁷ Prison Operations Manual M.02.01.01

387. We asked several prisoners about their security classifications. They all knew their security classification and told us they had had this explained to them by custodial staff. Prisoners knew what they had to do to maintain or reduce their security classification.
388. In the six-month review period, there were 17 complaints by 11 prisoners via the PC.01 process regarding security classifications. Five of the 11 prisoners submitted multiple complaints requesting reviews of their security classifications. Of these reviews, four were completed within the required timeframe.
389. In the same period, there were five complaints by five prisoners to the Office of the Inspectorate regarding security classifications.
390. As previously noted, the site was not using the Remand Management Tool to assess prisoners on remand. All remand prisoners were being managed in high security environments.
391. As previously mentioned, at the time of our inspection, most units were not housing transgender prisoners. However, Principal Corrections Officers across the site were able to describe the appropriate management of transgender prisoners, including placing them appropriately. We reviewed IOMS and confirmed that the two transgender prisoners at the site both had a 'not to double-bunk' alert.

Segregation and cell confinement

Inspection Standards

- Prisoners are placed on directed segregation only with proper authority and for the shortest time period, which is regularly reviewed. Prisoners understand why they have been segregated.
- Prisoners are kept safe at all times while on directed segregation and individual needs are recognised and given proper attention.
- Cell confinement is subject to strict policies and procedures.
- Prisoners suspected of internal concealment are located in a dry cell as a last resort and the proper authorisation is recorded.

392. Prison management can temporarily separate a prisoner from others because they pose a threat to the good order of the prison or the safety of others⁴⁸ or for their own safety.⁴⁹ Prisoners may also be separated from others for the purposes of medical oversight.⁵⁰ In prisons, these measures are generally known as directed segregation. A segregation direction expires after 14 days unless the Chief Executive directs that it continues. The direction should be reviewed monthly, and if continued after three months, should be directed and monitored by a Visiting Justice.
393. During the six-month review period, 319 prisoners were placed on a total of 380 periods of directed segregation. For more detail, see the table below:

⁴⁸ Corrections Act 2004, Section 58 (1)(a) and (1)(b), allows for segregation for the purposes of security, good order, or the safety of others.

⁴⁹ Corrections Act 2004, Section 59 (1)(b), allows for segregation for the purpose of protective custody. This allows Prison Directors to put a prisoner on segregation for the prisoner's own safety.

⁵⁰ Corrections Act 2004, Section 60 (1)(a) and (1)(b), allows for the segregation of prisoners for medical oversight, either for their physical or mental health.

Type of directed segregation	Number of prisoners	Periods of segregation
Section 58 (1)(a) for security or good order of the prison	65	69
Section 58 (1)(b) for the safety of other prisoners	210	266
Section 59 (1)(b) directed segregation for prisoner's own safety	22	23
Section 60 (1)(a) medical oversight, physical health	20	20
Section 60 (1)(b) medical oversight, mental health	2	2
TOTALS	319	380

394. At the time of our inspection, there were 22 prisoners on directed segregation. Eighteen of these men were located in the Management Unit, two were in HM3, one was in HM8, and one was in the ISU. One was being held under Section 58 (1)(a) for the security or good order of the prison, 15 were being held under Section 58 (1)(b) for the safety of others, four were being held under Section 59 (1)(b) for the purposes of directed protective custody (i.e. for the prisoner's own safety), and two were being held under Section 60 (1)(a) for medical oversight (physical health).
395. Fifteen of the 22 men on directed segregation were Māori, two were European/Pākehā, two were Pacific peoples, and three had their ethnicity recorded as 'Other'.
396. We reviewed the directed segregation paperwork for the men in the Management Unit. We found all documents had been appropriately approved by the regional senior advisor, and all but one of the management plans had been signed by the prisoner or two witnessing officers.
397. Men on directed segregation may be denied association with all other prisoners, or placed on restricted segregation where they are only permitted to associate with other men with the same segregation status. Our review of the segregation paperwork for the men in the Management Unit at the time of our inspection showed one man was on restricted segregation and all the others were on denied association. This meant all the men were on individual unlocks so were not associating with any other prisoners.
398. Staff in the Management Unit told us prisoners were told the reason they had been placed on directed segregation and how they would be managed according to their management plans. Staff told us prisoners were given a copy of their directed segregation paperwork.

399. Staff told us many of the management plans were fairly generic as most of the men were received into the Management Unit for similar issues relating to assaults on staff or other prisoners, or damage to property. However, we were told the plans would be individualised in relation to the application of handcuffs dependant on a prisoner's level of compliance. The management plans covered minimum entitlements. We reviewed these and observed the management plans tended to be generic.
400. We observed, and staff confirmed, that two men were being managed as maximum-security prisoners according to their management plans. One was a remand accused prisoner and we did not observe any approval paperwork to support his management as a maximum-security prisoner. The other prisoner being managed as maximum security was classified as high pending a security classification review outcome.
401. Staff told us the length of time prisoners spent in the Management Unit generally depended on their behaviour. Staff told us senior managers (i.e. Prison Director, Deputy Prison Director, Residential Manager) visited the prisoners every day to talk to them and to assess if any directed segregation orders could be revoked early. We reviewed prisoners' electronic and hard copy files and the unit logbook, and found that these visits were not always recorded. We note it is good practice to regularly review directed segregation orders and revoke them early if possible.
402. COBRA records showed that most prisoners at Rimutaka Prison had their directed segregation revoked within 14 days. However, at the time of the inspection there were nine prisoners whose segregation had continued beyond this timeframe. This included one prisoner who had remained on segregation for over 160 days and who was also denied association with any other prisoners.
403. We note that one other man in the six-month review period had been held on directed segregation for over three months. This man had also been denied association with others. Both men would therefore likely have experienced solitary confinement as that term is defined in the Mandela Rules – more than 22 hours a day without "meaningful human interaction".⁵¹
404. Moreover, the Mandela Rules prohibit solitary confinement in excess of 15 days, so these two men would likely have experienced "prolonged solitary confinement" as it is defined in the Mandela Rules. Fifteen days is the limit between "solitary confinement" and "prolonged solitary confinement" because the literature suggests that after that point some of the harmful psychological effects of isolation can become irreversible.⁵²
405. Segregation which continues beyond three months requires regular review and approval by a Visiting Justice until it is revoked or left to expire. Follow-up checks identified that these two men's continued segregation beyond three months had not been approved by a Visiting Justice.⁵³

⁵¹ As we set out in our Separation and Isolation Thematic Report published in March 2023, "Solitary confinement is a legitimate tool of prison management. However, where a prisoner's opportunity for social interaction is limited for an extended period, there is a risk that the prisoner may experience insufficient meaningful human interaction to sustain their health and wellbeing. For this reason, the Mandela Rules prohibit solitary confinement in excess of 15 days."

⁵² For example, Mendez, J.E. (5 August 2021), *Interim Report by the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment A/66/268*.

⁵³ For the man who was still on directed segregation at the time of our inspection, the Chief Custodial Officer's team brought this to the site's attention. The site rectified this by ensuring his continued segregation was reviewed and approved by a Visiting Justice.

406. Staff in the Management Unit told us if a prisoner declined to come out of his cell during unlock, staff recorded this in the movements log. If a pattern developed, staff would write a file note in IOMS and monitor the man more closely, conducting regular welfare checks and giving updates to other staff at morning briefings. If staff assessed the man as being at risk of self-harm, they would notify management.
407. We interviewed two men in the Management Unit. One told us he always got his minimum entitlement of one hour out of his cell for exercise every day. The other man told us he did not always get his minimum entitlement, but when we checked his IOMS file it appeared that he had been offered the time but had declined it.
408. If prisoners are suspected of concealing items (such as drugs) internally, they may be placed on directed segregation (under Section 60). During the six-month review period, one prisoner at Rimutaka Prison was placed on directed segregation for suspected internal concealment of items for a period of two days.
409. Prisoners suspected of concealing items internally may be put into a dry cell. A dry cell does not have running water, a toilet, or a privacy screen. There were three dry cells in the Intervention and Support Unit at Rimutaka Prison, but staff in the unit told us that now the prison has a full body scanner in the Receiving Office, the dry cells were no longer used. We inspected the dry cells and found that two of them were being used as storage areas. The third dry cell had a mattress in it. We checked COBRA and found that during the six-month review period the prisoner suspected of internal concealment (as mentioned above) had been held in a dry cell for two days.
410. Staff in the Intervention and Support Unit told us if they had to use the dry cell (for example, because a prisoner refused to be scanned) they were aware they could only put a prisoner into it for three hours before documentation had to be completed.
411. Prisoners can request to be separated from others; this is known as voluntary segregation.⁵⁴ At the time of our inspection COBRA recorded 316 prisoners on voluntary segregation at Rimutaka Prison. In the six-month review period, 1,076 men had been on 1,504 periods of voluntary segregation.
412. If a prisoner is charged with an offence against discipline and the misconduct is proved, a hearing adjudicator may impose one or more penalties against the prisoner, including forfeiture or postponement of privileges up to 28 days, forfeiture of earnings for up to seven days, or confinement in a cell for up to seven days.⁵⁵
413. In the six-month review period, 127 prisoners at Rimutaka Prison were subject to 161 periods of cell confinement. Staff at Rimutaka Prison told us prisoners served penalties of cell confinement in their own cells.

⁵⁴ Corrections Act 2004, Section 59 (1)(a) allows prisoners to request that their opportunity to associate with other prisoners be restricted or denied and the prison director considers that this is in the best interests of the prisoner. Prisoners generally request to be put on voluntary segregation if they are concerned for their safety.

⁵⁵ Corrections Act 2004, Section 133. Loss of privileges stated in Corrections Regulations 2005, Section 158.

Incentives

Inspection Standards

- Systems of rewards and privileges appropriate for different categories of prisoners are established, in order to encourage prosocial behaviour, develop a sense of responsibility and secure the interest and cooperation of prisoners.

414. For prisoners who are employed in prison industries, there is a national Prisoner Incentive Allowance framework. This framework gives prisoners an allowance rate of between 20 and 60 cents an hour, depending on the work and their skill level and behaviour.
415. At the time of our inspection, Rimutaka Prison was formally assessing prisoners who were working in prison industries against this framework. For example, in the prison kitchen, workers started at 20c an hour. Once they had completed food safety qualifications, this rate would increase to 30c and then 40c an hour. Workers who were completing a Level 3 catering qualification would get 60c an hour. This encouraged prisoners to work hard, to upskill, and to behave well. Two prisoners we interviewed told us they had to follow the rules to keep their jobs in the kitchen.
416. Formal assessments were signed off by the Principal Instructor and the Manager Industries. We noted that assessments for prisoners to earn 60c an hour are supposed to be signed off at the Assistant Prison Director level but were being signed off at the Manager Industries level.
417. Prisoners we interviewed across the site told us there were no incentives in their units. One prisoner told us he thought maybe if you behaved well, you would be more likely to be given a job in the unit.
418. We noted there were limited opportunities for men to get jobs as unit cleaners. In most of the units we visited there were waitlists of prisoners for these jobs.

Discipline

Inspection Standards

- Disciplinary sanctions against prisoners are imposed by the proper authority.
- Prisoners are subject to disciplinary procedures which are fair and proportionate and follow due process.
- Prisoners are promptly informed of any disciplinary sanction, and understand the charges and procedures they face.
- Interpreter services will be used, where necessary, to explain any disciplinary charges, procedures and the process for defending the charges.
- Prison management does not rely on prisoners for any disciplinary functions, whether in a formal or informal manner.

419. Prisons are required to maintain good discipline and order through effective supervision, communication, and fair and effective disciplinary procedures. Offences against discipline committed by a prisoner can result in a misconduct charge. Disciplinary action must be well documented by staff, and disciplinary hearings must comply with statutory and regulatory

requirements.⁵⁶ Offences against discipline are outlined in the legislation with guidance on the misconduct process described in the Prison Operations Manual.⁵⁷

420. Prisoners we spoke to in some high security units told us they thought staff managed incidents well and that, generally, anyone involved in an incident would be moved out of the unit.
421. Prisoners in some other high security units told us they had seen staff handcuff someone and take them to the Management Unit, but had not seen any incidents.
422. Generally, we observed that custodial staff across the prison appeared to be supervising prisoner behaviour. However, the quality of the supervision varied between units.
423. While we were in some high security units, we observed prisoners engaging in behaviour staff should have stopped, but did not, suggesting it was commonplace behaviour. For example, in one unit we observed prisoners exercising by hanging off the upper landing railing to do pull-ups. This was dangerous behaviour that staff should have stopped, but they ignored it. In another high security unit, we observed prisoners training by sparring. Staff saw and ignored this, although sparring during training is not permitted in prisons.
424. As mentioned above, if a prisoner is charged with an offence against discipline and the charge is proved, a hearing adjudicator or visiting justice may impose one or more penalties against the prisoner. Penalties include forfeiture or postponement of privileges up to 28 days, forfeiture of earnings for up to seven days, or confinement in a cell for up to seven days.⁵⁸
425. During the six-month review period, men at Rimutaka Prison generated 716 misconducts. In the same period for the previous year there had been 488 misconducts, so there had been an increase in misconducts. The increase may have been because, as previously mentioned, both the overall population and the proportion of men on remand had increased at Rimutaka Prison.
426. In the six-month review period, 510 misconducts were proven, 109 were appealed, 72 were adjourned, 65 were dismissed as they could not be proven, and 25 were withdrawn.
427. Misconduct hearings were held on site two days a week. We interviewed one of the prosecutors who told us there were two full-time prosecutors at Rimutaka Prison, with an additional two trained staff to support them if they were on leave. The prosecutor told us Tuesdays and Thursdays were the hearing days for the site. He told us they had heard 1,100 misconducts in the year to date (i.e. 1 January 2023 to 4 December 2023) and that it would be around 1,200 by the end of 2023. In 2022, they had heard 960 misconducts. The prosecutor told us they felt the number of misconducts had increased recently because prisoners were “frustrated about having limited time out of their cells, staff shortages, gang activity, and being transferred to Auckland”.
428. The prosecutor we interviewed also told us there were 14 hearing adjudicators on site. He said they were all “pretty good” but that getting them to the hearing could be hard sometimes, for example, if an adjudicator was on sick leave sometimes there was no

⁵⁶ Prosecutors are staff trained to charge prisoners with an offence and who have responsibility for proving that charge. Hearing adjudicators have the power to hear complaints relating to offences against discipline alleged to have been committed by a prisoner.

⁵⁷ Corrections Act, 2004, Section 128-140. POM MC.01

⁵⁸ Corrections Act 2004, Section 133. Loss of privileges stated in Corrections Regulation 2005, Section 158.

replacement adjudicator available and the hearing had to be adjourned. However, no misconducts had been withdrawn due to a lack of hearing adjudicators.

429. The prosecutor told us charges were generally heard within the correct timeframe. Adjournments were sometimes granted, for example, if a staff member who was a witness was unavailable to give evidence due to roster patterns or leave.

Health professionals' role in discipline

Inspection Standards

- Health professionals do not participate in disciplinary sanctions.

430. There was no evidence to suggest that health staff had participated in any disciplinary sanctions.

Use of Force

Inspection Standards

- Force is used only against prisoners as a last resort and never as a disciplinary procedure. When used, force is legitimate, necessary, proportionate, and subject to rigorous governance.
- Instruments of restraint are used only in clearly defined circumstances, when lesser forms of control fail, and only for the time strictly required.

431. Staff may use force in response to an incident at a prison. The Corrections Act, Section 83, states that physical force can only be used in prescribed circumstances and if reasonably necessary. Corrections policy outlines the circumstances in which force may be needed and what intervention should be deployed. Staff may use force only if there is no other option, in self-defence or the defence of another person, or if a prisoner is attempting to escape, damaging property or resisting a lawful order.⁵⁹
432. All uses of force must be logged in a use of force register, and details of the incident must be included as outlined in policy. A use of force review must be conducted. A member of the health team (usually a nurse) must assess the prisoner after every use of force.
433. In the six-month review period, COBRA records showed force had been used 88 times at Rimutaka Prison. Eighty-six of these incidents were spontaneous and two were planned.
434. Thirteen of the 88 uses of force included the deployment of pepper spray. There were 11 uses of force where staff drew their pepper spray but did not deploy it.
435. We were told the Custodial Systems Manager checked all incidents to ensure that any involving force were captured on the use of force register. We reviewed the use of force register and found two of the 88 uses of force had not been recorded on the register. These two incidents were linked to other incidents on the same day and related to the same prisoner, but they should have been entered in the register and reviewed separately.

⁵⁹ POM IR.02 Incident Response

436. We were told the Custodial Systems Manager also oversaw the use of force review process to ensure timeliness.
437. As part of the inspection we requested use of force documentation for a sample of 12 uses of force from the review period. We found the quality of the documentation varied. In some cases prisoners had been interviewed outside of the three-hour timeframe following the use of force, or there was no at-risk assessment included with the documentation, no date or time given for when the prisoner was seen by a nurse, no notification that mechanical restraints had been used, or no request for CCTV footage to be saved. However, there was good evidence of hot and cold debriefs taking place following use of force incidents.
438. We found a number of the use of force reviews contained recommendations which were very similar and rather generic. However, when reviews contained specific recommendations, we noted these had been assigned to an appropriate manager or process for action, and we were given confirmation of the assurance and completion process for these. When reviews raised common themes, we were told these would be raised at wider staff briefings or managed via the site's learning and development process.
439. We also reviewed the body worn camera and CCTV footage of the 12 use of force incidents. We observed that for some incidents the force used was not deemed to be necessary, reasonable or proportionate. We noted that these incidents had been identified during the site's use of force reviews and had been appropriately referred for further consideration and action.
440. However, most prisoners we interviewed told us they had not been involved in a use of force, nor seen one taking place. We interviewed one prisoner who told us he had been subject to use of force. He raised no issues and said the use of force was reasonable.

Searches

Inspection Standards

- Searches of cells and prisoners are carried out only when necessary and are proportionate, with due respect for privacy and dignity.
- Trans prisoners can nominate staff of their preferred gender identity to perform searches, and their dignity and privacy is protected at all times.

441. Contraband (such as drugs, alcohol and weapons) can create risks to safety and good order in a prison. For this reason, prison staff are required to undertake a range of regular searches, including cell searches and rub-down searches of prisoners.
442. In the six-month review period, the site recorded 196 incidents where contraband was found. The largest category of contraband found was 'Other' with 72 incidents ('Other' includes items such as tobacco and smoking equipment, gang paraphernalia and prescription medicines) followed by 35 incidents recorded as 'Tattoo Equipment'. The three categories 'Alcohol', 'Drugs', and 'Drugs Paraphernalia' together comprised 68 of the 196 incidents.
443. Prisons may conduct random drug and alcohol testing of prisoners to detect and prevent the introduction of drugs and alcohol into prison. In the six-month review period, Rimutaka Prison conducted 298 random drug and alcohol tests. Thirteen of these tests (4%) returned a positive result. The most common substance found was alcohol, which was found in eight of the 13 positive test results.

444. Custodial staff may undertake cell searches at any time and, in addition, must search three occupied cells a day that have been selected by central control.⁶⁰ Staff told us central control sent an email each morning informing them which cells had to be searched.
445. We observed custodial officers searching cells in several units across the prison. Staff conducted their searches in a respectful manner and attempted to leave everything as they had found it. However, we observed that the quality of the searches varied. For example, staff did not always search all items or areas of the cell, and did not always use the relevant equipment such as mirrors to inspect concealed areas.
446. The Prison Operations Manual sets out that custodial officers may conduct rub-down searches of prisoners at any time for the purpose of detecting an unauthorised item, and must do so every time prisoners move between areas (for example, from the unit to an exercise yard).⁶¹ We observed staff across the prison performing rub-down searches and noted that the quality of these searches was variable. Some searches were of a reasonable standard, but others were cursory and would not have detected unauthorised items. For example, hats were not removed, shoes were not removed, and bags were not checked.
447. In the six-month review period, COBRA records showed staff completed six reasonable grounds' strip searches.
448. As previously mentioned, Rimutaka Prison had a full body scanner in the Receiving Office which meant most prisoners being received did not need to be strip searched. We were told that if a prisoner needed to be strip searched on the site, staff would use discretion about whether they conducted the strip search in the usual manner, or if they escorted the prisoner to the Receiving Office to use the scanner. For example, staff in the Management Unit told us that while they had a room available for strip searches, they no longer used it because they had access to the body scanner.
449. Two Principal Corrections Officers we spoke with were able to outline the correct process for searching a transgender prisoner by allowing them to choose the gender of the officer conducting the rub-down or strip search. The Principal Corrections Officers told us they had completed the Working with Trans People in Our Care training on Corrections' My Learning Hub with their staff who were now also aware of this policy.
450. The site Intelligence Team told us sometimes they had requested searches based on intelligence they had received but that custodial staff had not carried these searches out in a timely manner. For example, the team told us there had been an occasion when they had received intelligence and requested that staff search the relevant cells, but there had been a delay of eight days before the search was done. Staff had subsequently not found anything.

⁶⁰ Prison Operations Manual S.01.Res.14.01 Cell search

⁶¹ Prison Operations Manual S.01.Res.10 Rub-down

Purposeful activity

Exercise and recreation

Inspection Standards

- All prisoners are able to spend at least one hour in the open air every day.
- Prisoners have access to physical exercise and recreational activities.

451. Every prisoner in New Zealand, other than those engaged in outdoor work, is entitled to a minimum of one hour of physical exercise every day. This exercise may be taken in the open air if the weather permits.
452. At the time of the inspection, all prisoners at Rimutaka Prison were being offered their minimum entitlement of one hour out of their cell in the open air every day. Most prisoners were receiving more than the minimum entitlement.
453. At the time of the inspection, the main prison gymnasium was not available to prisoners. There were no Activity Officers (i.e. gym instructors) on site. Prisoners in high security units had access to concrete exercise yards. Prisoners in low security units had access to unit compounds and some had access to a unit gym.
454. In the high security units (HM1 to HM14), prisoners told us they were generally getting between one-and-a-half to three hours a day out of their cells following a recent change to the regime. They could spend this time in the exercise yards or in communal recreation areas.
455. Exercise yards in these units generally contained pull up bars, a basketball hoop and a volleyball net, and prisoners had access to a volleyball and rugby ball. There were no structured exercise activities in these units. The Principal Corrections Officer in one of these units told us there were some items of old gym gear, such as weight bags, in the yards that prisoners could use. Prisoners across the high security units told us they used improvised weights in order to do weight training.
456. Table tennis and board games were available in the communal recreation areas in the high security units, but prisoners told us they often felt bored.
457. Prisoners in the low security units (i.e. Unit 4, Unit 7, Unit 8, Unit 9 and Unit 10) were generally unlocked for most of the day. For example, a typical unlock regime generally had prisoners unlocked from 7am to 11.30am, locked in their cells between 11.30 to 1pm, then unlocked again from 1pm to 6.30pm – a total of 10 hours of unlock time.
458. During their unlock time, prisoners in the low security units had access to their unit compounds which are large open grass and concrete areas surrounded by the cell blocks. Prisoners had access to volleyballs and rugby balls.
459. Prisoners in some of the low security units also had access to small unit gyms which we observed were well equipped. The Principal Corrections Officer of one of these units told us the gym was open all day but despite this, there was very little for the prisoners to do. He said, "there are a lot of unlock hours to do nothing". He also told us they were waiting for extra gym and recreation equipment, including a pool table.
460. The Principal Corrections Officer of one low security unit told us that sometimes on Saturdays and Sundays they would organise games of volleyball and touch rugby for the prisoners.

461. In Unit 7, as well as the gym, we observed there was a recreation room with table tennis, a pool table, chess, books and magazines. There was a communal dining room in this unit and we saw a small group of prisoners playing cards in this room.
462. In the Special Treatment Unit (i.e. Unit 9) we observed a group of men taking part in an organised activity making Christmas cards and gifts for family/whānau. Another small group of men in this unit was engaged in a prisoner-led te reo Māori class. In this unit there was also a well-equipped music room (see image 14 in Appendix A), gym, and recreation room with a television. Posters were displayed advertising an upcoming speech competition.
463. Unit 10 (the High Dependency Unit) was being used to accommodate prisoners with age-related health conditions or complex health and disability needs. These prisoners had access to a communal dayroom/dining room which contained tables and chairs, armchairs, a television, a shelf of books, and a fish tank. There was also an outdoor concrete patio area with seating and shade cloths. The outdoor area contained a few pot plants and had a view through a wire mesh fence to a grassy garden area.
464. As previously mentioned, at the time of our inspection, ten men in Unit 10 Rimu wing did not have age-related health conditions or disability needs. These men were waitlisted to relocate to the internal Self Care Unit. These men were accommodated in single cells around a large open-air compound. The compound contained a grassy area, tennis court and basketball court, and we were told prisoners had access to it for most the day.
465. These ten men also had access to a unit gym that contained a range of equipment including table tennis. The equipment appeared to be old and the prisoners we spoke with told us it was not fit for purpose. They commented that there were no structured activities. One prisoner told us he spent a lot of time "just walking around". Men in this part of Rimu unit also had access to a communal dayroom/dining room which was furnished with a large dining table, couches, a pool table and small library area.
466. Prisoners in the Management Unit and Intervention and Support Unit were receiving the minimum entitlement of one hour out of their cell in the open air every day.
467. In the Management Unit, men were unlocked individually. As previously mentioned, building work was occurring in the main exercise yard in this unit at the time of the inspection, so men were using the small exercise yard which was attached to an empty cell in the Separates area for their daily fresh air and exercise. There were no pull-up bars in that yard. The Principal Corrections Officer told us he expected the building work in the main exercise yard in the Management Unit to be finished within a week, and a second yard to be completed by the end of January 2024.
468. In the Intervention and Support Unit, the Principal Corrections Officer told us there were five exercise yards and two dayrooms.
469. As previously noted in the Environment section of this report, we inspected one exercise yard in the Intervention and Support Unit which contained a table and chair and a toilet with a privacy screen. There was algae growing on the concrete around the toilet area which needed pressure washing.
470. The ISU dayrooms contained tables, chairs and beanbags, a television and a blackboard. We observed that one of the dayroom televisions was visible from one of the yards in the ISU. This yard had speakers in it so prisoners in the yard could watch and listen to the television from the yard if they wished.

Communication and relationships with family and whānau

Inspection Standards

- Prisoners are encouraged to maintain contact with family/whānau members.
- Prisoners have regular access to visits.
- Prisoners have regular access to telephones and other communications, subject to a risk assessment.
- Prisoners are assisted to contact and consult with legal representatives in relation to family matters.
- A prisoner's family situation is identified and support planning undertaken to proactively assist them in maintaining contact with family.
- Prisoners and their families receive ongoing active support to maintain or re-establish relationships, where it is appropriate.
- Prisoners are located as close as possible to their family/whānau and the community they have a strong attachment to. If prisoners are placed in prisons outside their home region, it is for the minimum time necessary and for an identified reason.
- Staff support prisoners to maintain close relationships with stable family or whānau.
- Prisoners can promptly inform their family or whānau or designated contact person about their imprisonment, transfers, illness or injury.
- Prison staff notify prisoners of the serious illness or death of a family/whānau member or significant other, and a risk/wellbeing assessment is subsequently conducted.

471. Prisoners should be able stay in contact with their family/whānau by telephone, mail, email, in-person visits, and video calling. All these modes of communication are reliant on prison staff facilitating access.
472. At the time of our inspection in December 2023 there were no family/whānau visits occurring at Rimutaka Prison.⁶² We heard there had been no in-person visits since August 2022.
473. The Prison Operations Manual sets out that prisoners are entitled to a minimum of one five-minute telephone call every week in addition to any calls to outside agencies or to their legal advisors.⁶³ Corrections covers the costs of national telephone calls so prisoners can maintain contact with family/whānau.⁶⁴
474. Prisoners we spoke with at Rimutaka Prison told us there were several ways they could stay in touch with family/whānau, including telephone calls, video calls, or by writing letters. Most prisoners told us they stayed in touch by telephone and by writing letters.

⁶² We note that Rimutaka Prison recommenced limited family/whānau visits on 11 March 2024.

⁶³ Prison Operations Manual C.02.02 Prisoner telephone criteria

⁶⁴ Corrections began transitioning prison sites onto a new telephone system and covering the costs of calls from 11 October 2022.

475. Before prisoners can make telephone calls, staff must approve the telephone number, including checking that the owner of the number is willing to receive calls from the prisoner. Staff must then load the number onto the system. Sometimes this process can take time. At Rimutaka Prison some prisoners in some high security units told us they had experienced delays in getting their telephone numbers approved, and had received little communication around this.
476. Most high security units had two telephones per unit (typically, one in the exercise yard and one in the communal recreation area), but we observed that in each wing of HM13 and HM14 there were three telephones. Staff and prisoners told us the third telephones had been installed recently. Staff told us this was due to the increased population in these wings and advised that there were plans to install additional telephones in other wings where the number of men was due to increase.
477. Several prisoners across the prison told us there was “always” a queue to use the telephones, but most said they managed to make calls. Some prisoners in the high security units told us it could be challenging to get through to family/whānau members who worked or were at school during the day and who were therefore unavailable to speak to them during their limited unlock times.
478. Two prisoners from a low security unit told us when they came back from work in the evening, sometimes there was not enough time for them to make a telephone call.
479. The Principal Corrections Officer in another low security unit told us there could be issues with some prisoners staying on the telephone for extended periods which meant other prisoners might miss out, especially if the unit was full. He said that although telephone calls from prisoners only lasted for 15 minutes before cutting out, prisoners could redial straight away and could have up to three hours of calls a day in total.
480. We observed that telephones in the high security units typically did not have privacy hoods fitted.
481. The Prison Operations Manual sets out that eligible prisoners may make video calls to family/whānau and friends who are approved visitors. In some cases, discretion to make video calls to people who are not currently approved visitors is also allowed. Video calling is not an entitlement, it is a privilege, and will be offered under specific conditions to protect the safety, privacy and security of all participants.⁶⁵ Video calls are generally made on a laptop. A staff member remains present while the call is taking place.
482. Prisoners at Rimutaka Prison could request to make video calls to approved visitors. For example, in one of the high security units the Principal Corrections Officer would facilitate video calls upon request. Calls would be held in the Principal Corrections Officer’s office on a laptop.
483. Two custodial staff members in another high security unit told us prisoners would be allowed to have a video call if they behaved well, which is in line with Corrections policy.
484. We observed variety across units regarding video call frequency and duration. We spoke to several prisoners across the site who reported making video calls to their families/whānau. Prisoners told us calls ranged from 10 to 30 minutes, and could be once a week, twice a week, or once a fortnight, depending on the unit.

⁶⁵ Prison Operations Manual C.05 Prisoner video calling

485. Some prisoners told us the approvals process for video calls took too long. Some other prisoners told us some families/whānau did not have the resources to be able to use video calling.
486. A few prisoners told us there was a lack of information regarding video calling and were not aware if they were allowed this.
487. According to COBRA data, one application for a prisoner to attend a tangi, funeral or commemoration ceremony for a family/whānau member or close friend had been made in the 2023 year. There had also been one application to visit a member of the prisoner's family or close friend who was seriously ill or incapacitated, and two applications to attend a religious service or religious activity.
488. Most prisoners had no issues with sending or receiving mail. One prisoner reported significant delays with mail. This was likely because his mail required translation into English for security reasons.

Visits

Inspection Standards

- Prisoners are aware of prison procedures and their visits entitlements.
- Prisoners and their visitors are able to attend visits in a clean, safe and respectful environment which meets their needs.
- Visitors are informed about search procedures, and understand their right to refuse the search and leave the prison.
- Child visitors are searched only when there are reasonable grounds. Reasons for the search should be explained to the child, who should be searched in full view of his/her guardian.
- Visits areas are child friendly and allow for physical contact.
- There is special provision of visits for children at times which are least interruptive of their education and other activities.

489. Every prisoner in New Zealand is entitled to receive at least one private visitor each week, approved through the prisoner application process, for a minimum duration of 30 minutes.
490. At the time of our inspection in December 2023 there were no face-to-face family/whānau visits occurring at Rimutaka Prison.⁶⁶ We were told this was due to custodial staff shortages. A review of COBRA showed that visits had not been available since August 2022. Moreover, COBRA showed there had been no visits for most months during 2022, though some visits had occurred in January, July and August that year.
491. We noted that since August 2022, two family/whānau visits had been allowed on compassionate grounds.
492. Site management told us they had looked at restarting visits just before our inspection and had asked custodial staff for expressions of interest in this area of work before finalising a

⁶⁶ We note that Rimutaka Prison recommenced limited family/whānau visits on 11 March 2024.

start date. However, there had not been enough staff available to safely resume visits at that time and so this had been deferred.

493. Prisoners we interviewed told us there had been no visits at Rimutaka Prison for “over a year” and we observed growing frustration regarding this. One prisoner told us they had been told the lack of visits was due to staffing shortages but had received no information about when visits would resume. He told us staff did not know when visits would resume either.
494. We note that the majority of prisoners we interviewed were not from the Wellington area and so had limited family/whānau living nearby. Staff told us they believed that if visits had been available, this would likely have impacted on the number of visits these prisoners received.
495. As previously mentioned, some video calls were being arranged to enable prisoners to maintain contact with family/whānau despite the lack of visits, though these video calls were a privilege, not an entitlement.
496. Rimutaka Prison has two visits halls. Despite the lack of visits, we inspected these and found them in a reasonably tidy condition. One hall had seating bolted to the floor while the other was fitted with moveable tables and chairs. Both visits halls had visitor toilets and baby changing facilities. Cold drinking water was available. Both halls had a view of a small garden area which was not accessible to prisoners or their visitors.
497. Both halls had family/whānau rooms. We observed there were limited child-appropriate activities available in these rooms. Staff told us that when visits had been operating they had provided colouring pages and pencils and would do so again when visits began.
498. The visits hall building also contained an AVL room, New Zealand Parole Board room (for parole board hearings), a Police interview room, and other interview rooms and non-contact booths for meetings with visitors such as lawyers, psychologists and probation officers.

Library

Inspection Standards

Prisoners have regular access to a suitable library, library materials and additional learning resources that meet their needs.

499. Rimutaka Prison has two libraries, one in the high security area and one in the programmes area. We observed that both libraries seemed well-stocked with fiction and non-fiction books and magazines. There were some books available in languages other than English.
500. At the time of our inspection, the site was budgeted for 1.5 FTE librarians, but only one was present as the other was on leave. The librarian who was in the library at the time of the inspection was newly recruited to the role and had not yet received training on how to complete all the required tasks, such as accessing new books. One of the site’s three interventions coordinators was temporarily covering for the librarian who was on leave.
501. The library was offering a catalogue service. Prisoners could order books and magazines using a form and the items would be delivered to their unit. Prisoners in some units told us they could order books once a week, and others told us once a fortnight. Prisoners could not visit either library to browse or be issued books in person.

502. Not all prisoners we spoke with knew how to access library books. One of these prisoners also told us he had not received an induction. We did not see any posters informing prisoners how to request library materials.
503. We observed that some units kept small collections of books and magazines for prisoners in that unit.
504. A few prisoners told us they did not use the library because they could not read or write and did not want to “look stupid” by asking for help.

Rehabilitation

Inspection Standards

- Appropriate interventions are provided to reduce the likelihood of reoffending and promote successful reintegration.
- Rehabilitation programmes, targeting the specific needs of the prisoner, are available and accessible.
- There is good cooperation and communication between the prison and social support organisations, including those that deliver rehabilitation programmes in the prison.

505. Offence-focused rehabilitation programmes help prisoners to address the thoughts, attitudes and behaviour that led to their offending, and support them to develop the skills to avoid reoffending after release. Offence-focused rehabilitation programmes are generally only offered to sentenced or remand convicted prisoners. Other interventions which are not offence-focused but which may contribute to a prisoner’s rehabilitation, such as parenting or driver license courses, may be offered to both sentenced and remand prisoners.
506. At the time of our inspection, Rimutaka Prison was running only one offence-focused rehabilitation programme. This was the Special Treatment Unit for Men with Violent Offending programme.
507. Prisons would generally offer a wider range of rehabilitation programmes. For example, at the time of our last follow-up inspection of Rimutaka Prison in October 2019, the site was offering several rehabilitation programmes, including: the Drug Treatment Programme, the Medium Intensity Rehabilitation Programme, Mauri Toa Rangatahi (a programme for men aged under 20), Te Tirohanga kaupapa Māori rehabilitation pathway (including the Mauri Tu Pae programme), and the Special Treatment Unit for Men with Violent Offending programme. We were told by site management at the time of our 2023 inspection that most rehabilitation programmes had been stopped due to the shortage of custodial staff.
508. Prisoners at Rimutaka Prison could still access rehabilitation programmes elsewhere if they were referred by their case managers, found suitable for the programme by Corrections Psychological Services, and if they were willing to be transferred to other prisons.
509. During interviews, many staff and prisoners voiced concerns over the lack of access to rehabilitation programmes at Rimutaka Prison.
510. One long-serving prisoner we interviewed expressed frustration at having to wait to near the end of his sentence to undertake a rehabilitation programme. He was scheduled to start a

programme in over ten years' time and told us he felt by then it would be more difficult to engage in thinking about factors related to his offending cycle. We note that offence-focused rehabilitation programmes are generally offered towards the end of a person's sentence. Corrections has advised us that research indicates such programmes are more effective in preventing reoffending when they are delivered close to the time of possible release into the community.

511. The Special Treatment Unit for Men with Violent Offending programme took place in Rimutaka Prison's Unit 9 (Te Whare Manaakitanga). Thirty men were living in this unit. During an interview, the Manager Psychological Services for the unit told us 15 of these men were taking part in the programme, six or seven had graduated and were on a maintenance programme, and the remaining men were in the assessment phase.
512. Later, in an email, the Manager Psychological Services told us that in the six-month review period, 19 men had started the programme and 14 had completed it.
513. The Manager Psychological Services told us that as well as completing the programme sessions, men in Unit 9 were offered other constructive activities including kapa haka, te reo Māori classes (taught by a prisoner), tikanga classes, writing and recording a song, creative writing, church services, cooking on a budget and CV writing. We heard that some of these activities helped prisoners learn to express themselves in creative ways instead of resorting to violence.
514. Some men in Unit 9 had taken part in whānau hui. The Manager Psychological Services supplied figures which showed there had been 47 whānau hui in the six-month review period.
515. We observed positive interactions between staff and prisoners in Unit 9. We observed an incident in Unit 9 which was well managed by staff. A prisoner became angry and upset when his partner failed to join a scheduled video call. Custodial staff approached him and spoke calmly with him, checking his wellbeing. Staff then called his therapist who took him to the programmes room and engaged with him there. The prisoner appeared to have calmed down significantly following these interactions.
516. Men we spoke with in this unit told us they mentored each other and often held each other to account for behaviour because they wanted the unit to continue as a community. We observed that the men seemed to be looking out for each other, and that clinical staff and custodial staff likewise appeared to work well together and to respect each other's roles in the men's rehabilitation. As previously mentioned in the Exercise and Recreation section of this report, there were plenty of constructive activities available to men in this unit, including structured activities such as making Christmas gifts for their children.
517. The Manager Psychological Services told us men for the programme were selected from a list of all prisoners in the Corrections Lower North Region who had been sentenced for a violence offence. When these prisoners reached low medium security classification, a psychologist contacted them by telephone to discuss the programme. If the prisoner was willing, he would be brought to the unit for assessment. If the prisoner was not interested, the psychologist tried to motivate him and would contact him a few times to encourage him to attend the programme.
518. We interviewed the Principal Programme Facilitator for the site who confirmed that her team was not running any other rehabilitation programmes in the prison. She told us the last programme to run at the site had been the Medium Intensity Rehabilitation Programme in 2022. She said at that time several men had been in the middle of the programme (they had completed 30 of 48 sessions) when they were told on 21 September 2022 that the programme would cease on 23 September 2022 due to custodial staff shortages.

519. The Principal Programme Facilitator told us she had asked for these men to complete the programme but had been informed that this would not be possible. The Principal Programme Facilitator gave the men the option of completing the course at another prison or in the community if they were nearing release. Several men completed the programme in this way or transferred to another relevant offence-focused programme such as the Short Rehabilitation Programme.
520. The Principal Programme Facilitator told us her team had proposed various options to try to continue running programmes despite custodial staff shortages, including running groups with smaller numbers, and using programmes rooms in units so prisoners would not need to be escorted out of their units. However, these were not approved. The Principal Programme Facilitator said there had been some barriers to these options occurring safely, such as concerns regarding custodial supervision of classes, which may have been the reason these were not approved, but she was not given any reasons.
521. The Principal Programme Facilitator said that at the time of the inspection there was a waitlist of men at Rimutaka Prison who were eligible to complete the Medium Intensity Rehabilitation Programme, the Short Motivational Programme, the Short Rehabilitation Programme, and Te Whakatōmene.⁶⁷
522. Corrections psychologists may provide individual offence-focused treatment sessions to some prisoners. These sessions typically address barriers to prisoners engaging in high intensity offence-focused rehabilitation programmes and assist with skill development to manage challenging behaviours. Corrections prioritises prisoners with the highest risk of serious reoffending for such sessions, including those with a high risk of serious violent offending, or sexual offending against adults or children. Corrections advised us that COBRA figures showed there were 16 starts and nine completions of individual treatment sessions by a psychologist at Rimutaka Prison in the six-month review period.

Offender Plans

Inspection Standards

- All prisoners have an offender plan.
- All prisoners receive support to achieve the targets in their offender plans and progress through their sentence.

523. All prisoners should meet with a case manager who assesses their needs and works with them to create a remand plan or an offender plan, depending on their status as a prisoner. The case manager should then support the prisoner to access rehabilitation programmes and other purposeful activities such as education.
524. Case managers are expected to meet with all prisoners on their caseload within 20 days of their arrival in prison. We reviewed the Case Management Standards of Practice for the six-month review period and found that case managers at Rimutaka Prison met the standard for initial contact in 74% of cases. They met the standard for agreeing an initial offender plan (within 40 days of imprisonment) in 76% of cases.

⁶⁷ Corrections intranet (page dated 19 October 2022) sets out that Te Whakatōmene (meaning to explore or investigate) is the name of the pre-programme assessment process for its medium intensity suite of programmes (excepting the Mauri Tu Pae and Saili Matagi programmes which have their own assessment processes).

525. At the time of our inspection, 20 prisoners did not yet have a case manager allocated to them. However, most of these prisoners were recent arrivals.
526. As set out in the Introduction to this report, at the time of our inspection case managers at the site told us their team was fully staffed with 30 case managers. They told us there was a lack of experience in their team with only three staff having been in the role for four years or more.
527. Case managers at the site told us during interviews that every prisoner was now being allocated a case manager. While this is standard practice, they told us that up until two weeks before our inspection the case management team had been short-staffed and so had not been able to meet with prisoners or create offender plans within the usual timeframes. They told us the situation had been exacerbated by the shortage of custodial staff as there were often not enough custodial staff available to assist them to access prisoners.
528. They had managed this situation by setting up a 'remand assessment team'. A member of this team would send remand accused prisoners a 'remand pack' which contained a case management 'self-assessment' form, a consent form, and an 'Out of Gate'⁶⁸ self-assessment form. When the prisoner had completed these forms and returned them, a member of the case management team would create a file note in IOMS, an offender plan (or remand plan), and an Out of Gate referral, if relevant. However, since many prisoners have low literacy levels, some prisoners did not complete and return these forms. When this occurred, the case managers made a note saying the forms were not returned but this meant there was little or no information in those offenders' plans.
529. Case managers at the site told us they understood that custodial staff were short-staffed and were therefore under pressure. Notwithstanding this, case managers told us some unit staff were more accommodating than others, but that some did not understand what case managers did, nor place any value on it, and so did not always properly facilitate case manager appointments with prisoners. They told us they had standards of practice to meet but often missed these due to access issues. This is reflected in the standard of practice figures given above for initial contact and agreeing an initial offender plan.
530. For example, some case managers told us they used the Bookings application⁶⁹ to book interview rooms in units to see prisoners, but that custodial staff did not look at the bookings. This meant when case managers arrived at the unit, staff had no knowledge of the appointment or the room had been double-booked. Case managers told us some unit interview rooms had been turned into storage rooms and were therefore unavailable. The inspection team confirmed that we observed interview rooms in units that were being used for storage. Case managers also told us about arriving at units for appointments and either being made to wait over 40 minutes to see the prisoner, or staff not coming to escort the prisoner from the interview room in a timely manner. One case manager told us he had been left waiting for over 30 minutes with a prisoner after the interview was over.
531. As previously mentioned, due to custodial staff shortages, there were few programmes or constructive activities available at the site. We consider the lack of visible activities may have contributed to some custodial staff not prioritising case management appointments.

⁶⁸ Out of Gate is a nationwide reintegration service that helps prisoners on short sentences (two years or less) or on remand to connect with community-based providers and find employment and accommodation on release.

⁶⁹ The Bookings application is an online tool developed for prisons that replaces the need for a paper-based diary. It lets staff book appointments with prisoners, rooms, and resources.

532. In addition, case managers told us they were only able to see prisoners during their unlock time, which could be limited. For example, as previously mentioned, prisoners in the high security units told us they were unlocked for between one-and-a-half to three hours a day. Case managers told us this meant they were competing for prisoners' time with all the other things the prisoners wanted to do during unlock, such as queuing for and making telephone calls to family/whānau, exercising, queuing for and using the self-service kiosk, and making calls to their lawyers.
533. We asked 14 prisoners if they had an offender plan. Twelve of them had an offender plan in IOMS, but seven of them said they were not aware they had offender plans. Six of the seven prisoners were on remand and one was sentenced.
534. Many other prisoners we spoke with were not sure what was in their offender plan or what was required of them to progress through their sentence.
535. Prisoners should also have a custodial case officer who actively manages them, for example by discussing offender plan progress and assisting with their needs. Prisoners should have a case officer assigned to them within three days of arriving in a new unit. Our review of COBRA records for the review period showed 34% of prisoners at Rimutaka Prison had a case officer allocated to them in a timely manner. Fifteen percent of prisoners had a case officer allocated, but not within the three-day timeframe outlined by policy. Fifty-one percent of prisoners had not had a case officer allocated to them.

Education

Inspection Standards

- Education and vocational training programmes are offered in line with the needs of the learners.

536. Within the first month of entering prison, all prisoners should receive an educational assessment and meet one-to-one with an education tutor to co-produce an individual learning pathway. Actions for the learning pathway should be shared with the case manager who includes them in the offender plan.
537. At the time of our inspection, three education tutors were available on site. The tutors reported to the Learning and Interventions Delivery Manager, who also managed any contracted education providers, the Volunteer Coordinator, the three interventions coordinators, the librarians and the chaplains.
538. Some education assessments and programmes were being delivered by education tutors at Rimutaka Prison at the time of our inspection, though there were no education programmes being delivered except in Unit 9 (the Special Treatment Unit). During the six-month review period, COBRA information for the site recorded:
- » 166 'Learning Pathways' conversations with an education tutor
 - » 11 education assessments using the Literacy Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool
 - » 5 completions of 'Self Directed Learning'.
539. We interviewed the Learning and Interventions Delivery Manager who expressed frustration that there were no education or other programmes running on site except in Unit 9 (the Special Treatment Unit) due to custodial staff shortages. The Learning and Interventions Delivery Manager had been trying to restart programmes but told us initiatives were declined

- due to security reasons and staffing levels. They were maintaining relationships with stakeholders for when they were allowed to return to the site.
540. The Learning and Interventions Delivery Manager told us they needed more resources for numeracy and literacy assessments and the follow-up required after such assessments. They estimated around 250 prisoners on site had not been assessed.
541. We interviewed three education tutors who told us they were currently assessing prisoners' numeracy and literacy needs, but that they only followed up if prisoners were at a basic level. They assessed prisoners by visiting them in their units. They told us they used the Bookings application to book interview rooms in the units and rang before they went to ensure they would be able to see the prisoners.
542. They told us they generally had a good relationship with custodial staff, but that sometimes, due to custodial staff shortages, appointments would be cancelled, and the tutors would have to rebook. They told us they talked with custodial staff about the importance of education, and this helped form supportive relationships. Despite this, they said that access to men in the high security units could be challenging.
543. The tutors told us one of the main challenges to prisoner education was that most courses had stopped due to custodial staff shortages. For example, they told us the Intensive Numeracy and Literacy course usually delivered by contracted provider Te Wānanga o Aotearoa had been stopped in early 2022.
544. The education tutors told us self-directed learning (e.g. by correspondence from Te Kura, the Open Polytechnic, Learning Connexions, and Massey University) was happening on the site. They estimated that at any one time about 100 prisoners were engaging in self-directed learning.
545. The tutors told us they provided worksheets and other education resources to remand prisoners, including regular issues of a monthly activity booklet called 'Poutama' that was produced in 2022 and 2023 by the Corrections Education Programmes Team. Corrections intranet sets out that these booklets were developed as part of its COVID-19 response to give prisoners something constructive to do in their cells.
546. Most of the prisoners we interviewed had not been seen by an Education Tutor.
547. Many prisoners expressed frustration about the lack of education and other programmes, especially prisoners in high security units.
548. We interviewed one of the site's three Intervention Coordinators who told us there were no programmes running on site except in Unit 9 (the Special Treatment Unit) due to custodial staff shortages. The Interventions Coordinator was not aware of any plans to allow programme and activity providers back onto the site.
549. The Interventions Coordinator told us there was a secure online learning suite at the prison but that it was not being used.
550. Prisoners across the site told us they did not know how to find out about education programmes. Information of this type would usually be made available in poster or brochure format, or provided by case managers, case officers, education tutors or other prisoners.

Supporting prisoner wellbeing

Inspection Standards

- Prisoners can access out of cell activities which promote learning, wellbeing, and support rehabilitation.

551. As previously mentioned, most prisoners at Rimutaka Prison were not engaging in any organised out of cell activities which promoted learning, wellbeing or which supported rehabilitation. Most organised activities had been stopped due to custodial staff shortages.
552. Some prisoners across the site had jobs (see next section) which promoted learning and supported rehabilitation.
553. Some low security units organised games such as volleyball or touch rugby, and we observed one prisoner giving te reo Māori lessons to his fellow prisoners. Beyond these ad hoc activities, most prisoners had little to do except exercise (on their own or with other prisoners) in the yards or compounds, watch television, listen to the radio, use the library service, or talk to family/whānau or to other prisoners.
554. Sometimes, prisoners may decline to come out of their cells at unlock time. We found there was no standard practice for managing this situation. Some custodial staff told us they monitored the wellbeing of prisoners who regularly declined to come out of their cells, and recorded this in IOMS. We consider this to be good practice. Some other staff said they would talk to the prisoner and, if necessary, escalate the issue to the Senior Corrections Officer or Principal Corrections Officer. Others told us they were unsure what action to take in this situation other than to report it to the Senior Corrections Officer.
555. Prisoners in Unit 10 Rimu who had previously been housed in the Self Care Unit told us they felt everything had changed since the high-profile escape in 2022 (as mentioned previously) and that their biggest issues now were boredom, not seeing family/whānau, lack of progression through their sentences and lack of reintegration activities.

Work

Inspection Standards

- All prisoners, where possible, can engage in work that is purposeful, benefits them and increases their employability.
- Prisoners' health and safety is safeguarded during all work activities to the same standards as in community based work.
- Prisoners receive a fair incentive payment for the work they perform.

556. Prisons should provide work opportunities for prisoners in their units, around the prison, and in prison industries.
557. As previously mentioned, for prisoners who are employed in prison industries, there is a national Prisoner Incentive Allowance framework. This framework gives prisoners an allowance rate of between 20 and 60 cents an hour, depending on the work, and their skill level and behaviour. At the time of our inspection, Rimutaka Prison was formally assessing

prisoners who were working in prison industries against this framework. This encouraged prisoners to work hard, to upskill, and to behave well.

558. Corrections has a Working Prisons programme in which prisons report the number of hours prisoners spent in some form of work, education or rehabilitation programme. In the six-month review period, Rimutaka Prison recorded that men had spent a total of 296,578 hours engaged in these activities, which meant the prison reached 76% of its Working Prison target goal of 389,999 hours. Following our review of the data, we had concerns about the accuracy of data recording when compared to the low level of activity we observed at the site.
559. At the time of our inspection, COBRA data indicated that 80 men were employed in a prison industry at Rimutaka Prison:
- » 33 as kitchen hands in the internal prison kitchen (see image 15 in Appendix A).
 - » 11 as nurserymen in the horticulture nursery
 - » 11 as storemen for the prison canteen distribution service
 - » 7 as general hands in the Staff College kitchen and the 'Doing Thyme' café (this was outside the prison wire so for safety reasons these workers had to be approved by an Advisory Panel)
 - » 6 as printers in the Printshop (see image 16 in Appendix A).
 - » 3 in the prison laundry distribution centre
 - » 3 as farm hands in the prison farm/grounds
 - » 2 as groundsmen for internal grounds work
 - » 2 as groundsmen for external grounds work (as above, these workers had to be approved by an Advisory Panel)
 - » 2 as general hands for 'industry employment'.
560. Most of these positions offered men the opportunity to work towards unit standards and gain relevant qualifications. For example, men in the kitchens could work towards the New Zealand Certificate in Catering, and men working in the laundry distribution centre could get unit standards for packaging and laundry handling.
561. During the review period, men at Rimutaka Prison achieved a total of seven tertiary level vocational certificates: two at NZ Certificate Level 2, four at NZ Certificate Level 3, and one at NZ Certificate Level 4.
562. In addition, we were told there had been 11 completions of a Growsafe⁷⁰ vocational course by men working in the nursery.
563. We inspected the horticulture nursery which was staffed by a Principal Instructor and three Instructors. We observed that all prisoner workers had an identified daily work programme which was displayed in the locker area. Prisoners worked from 8.45am to 2.45pm Monday to Friday, with a break for lunch in a clean and tidy lunchroom. There appeared to be good tool management processes in place with regular checks. There was a classroom where we observed a good supply of reference books and manuals. We heard that as well as the Growsafe course, men could work towards completing Health and Safety and agrichemical handling programmes. We heard there was a new panel that met fortnightly to select men to start work in the nursery. The Principal Instructor and Instructors told us they were happy with the new process because it gave them more input into who was employed.

⁷⁰ Growsafe is the brand of the New Zealand Agrichemical Education Trust, a not-for-profit organisation promoting the safe, responsible and effective use of agrichemicals.

564. As mentioned above, prisoners with jobs outside the prison wire had to be approved by an Advisory Panel for safety reasons. Jobs outside the wire were given to highly trusted prisoners who were not considered a safety risk by the Advisory Panel.
565. Kitchen staff told us it could take up to six weeks to have a worker replaced because the Advisory Panel sat once a fortnight. Names of prisoners were put forward to the panel. They would consider a range of factors and decline any prisoners they assessed as unsuitable.
566. In addition, some men were employed, usually part-time, in unit-based work such as cleaning.
567. Prisoners in the high security units told us there were opportunities for unit employment. They knew if they wanted to be considered for unit-based employment they could put their name down on a list. Staff in one of the high security units told us when considering who would get the jobs, they considered prisoners' behaviour and attitude towards staff.

Religious or spiritual support

Inspection Standards

- Prisoners are supported by the chaplaincy, which contributes to prisoners' overall care, support and rehabilitation.
- Prisoners' freedom of religion is respected, and they are able to practise their religion.

568. At the time of our inspection there were three chaplain roles who were contracted to give faith-based support to prisoners at Rimutaka Prison. One FTE chaplain was in the role, as was a part-time chaplain who worked three-and-a-half days a week at the site. The third chaplain was due to start the week after our inspection and would work four days a week at the site.
569. We interviewed the FTE chaplain who had been in the role since 2021. He told us the restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, compounded by the custodial staff shortages, meant that a lot of the usual services were no longer running at the site.
570. He told us there were no church services being offered to men in the high security units. A chaplain led a fortnightly church service on a weekday for men in the low security units. Volunteers were no longer allowed on the site. Before 2021, they used to have volunteer church groups at the site delivering four or five church services on a Sunday, but this had ceased.
571. The chapel had not been used since 2021. Instead, church services were conducted in one of the visits halls.
572. The chaplain told us there were a number of Muslim prisoners. An imam was ready to come onto the site to visit them, but because volunteers were no longer admitted due to custodial staff shortages, he had not visited. Staff in Unit 9 (the Special Treatment Unit) had facilitated AVL calls between the imam and some Muslim prisoners.
573. The chaplain told us men could request to see a chaplain via custodial staff, their case managers, or health staff, or could approach a chaplain directly if they saw them in their unit. However, the chaplains could only walk about the unit in the low security area of the prison, so chaplains were not visible in the high security units, even though the chaplain felt the

- highest need was in the high security units. The chaplain told us access to the Intervention and Support Unit was usually good.
574. The chaplain told us the timeframe between a prisoner requesting to see them and being seen was "a couple of days".
575. The chaplain told us mental health staff at Rimutaka Prison were understaffed as a lot of positions were not filled. He told us a consequence of this was that chaplains became a "stop-gap" even though they were not qualified mental health practitioners.
576. We asked several custodial staff about access to spiritual support. The Principal Corrections Officer in one of the low security units told us a chaplain came to the unit about once a month. The Principal Corrections Officer told us prisoners in the unit would get together and organise their own prayers.
577. Many prisoners we spoke with told us they were unaware of the chaplains. The prisoners who knew chaplains were available knew to ask staff to put in a request to be seen.
578. As previously mentioned, the Volunteer Coordinator told us there were three kaiwhakamana who came to the site every week and who could offer spiritual support. The Volunteer Coordinator confirmed that no other volunteers were allowed on the site, except for those who visited Unit 9 (the Special Treatment Unit).
579. The Principal Corrections Officer in the Intervention and Support Unit told us the chaplain and kaiwhakamana visited the unit regularly and had a settling and calming effect on the prisoners.

Reintegration

Inspection Standards

- Where possible, prisoners are housed in prisons close to their families or in prisons which meet their rehabilitative needs.
- Prisoners are able to keep up to date with news and the outside world while in prison, where appropriate.
- Prison management actively prepares prisoners for their release by facilitating access to post-release services.
- Prisoners with continuing health and social care needs are prepared and assisted to access appropriate services in the community prior to their release.
- Prisoners with drug and/or alcohol problems are prepared for release and have access to appropriate support and continued treatment in the community.
- Prior to release, prisoners have an up-to-date plan for addressing outstanding rehabilitation needs, which is managed in partnership with Community Corrections.
- Prisoners are given all necessary practical support and support information ready for their day of release.
- Pre and post-release reintegration programmes are available and are gender responsive.
- Offender plans are gender responsive and take into account, and plan for, prisoner's post-release social reintegration requirements from the beginning of their sentence.

580. Reintegration activities aim to help prisoners identify and overcome any barriers to successfully transitioning back into the community.
581. In the six-month review period 172 prisoners were released from Rimutaka Prison.
582. Case managers should assist sentenced prisoners to develop a release plan as they approach release. At Rimutaka Prison, case managers met the standard for release planning in 84% of cases in the six-month review period.
583. In the six-month review period, COBRA records showed there had been 182 referrals to reintegration programmes or services for men at Rimutaka Prison. Referrals were to the following providers: Care NZ (105 referrals), Salvation Army (31 referrals), Manaaki Support Services (12), NZ Community Living (11), Ōrongomai Marae (11), Te Pā (9), Kahungunu Health Service – Choices (2), and Wera Aotearoa Charitable Trust (1).
584. Some of these providers (for example, Care NZ and Te Pā) are contracted providers of Corrections' 'Out of Gate' service. Out of Gate is a nationwide reintegration navigation service that helps prisoners on short sentences (two years or less) or on remand to find employment and accommodation and connect with community providers.

585. COBRA records showed that in the six-month review period, 55 men had been assisted to get a Kiwi Access Card.⁷¹ Many prisoners have no form of ID which makes it difficult for them to secure basic services in the community such as banking, rental housing and employment, so assisting them to get this card may be a useful reintegration service.
586. As previously mentioned, at the time of our inspection most programmes and activities at Rimutaka Prison had stopped due to custodial staff shortages. This meant there were limited activities for men attempting to ready themselves for release. During an interview, two principal case managers told us that men who needed to do programmes had to be transferred out of the region.
587. Completing a rehabilitation or reintegration programme may strengthen a prisoner's readiness for appearance before the New Zealand Parole Board. However, staff told us they were producing "a lot" of New Zealand Parole Board reports "for nothing" as the prisoners had not completed any rehabilitation or reintegration activities and so were unlikely to be granted parole. We interviewed two Principal Case Managers at the site who told us men sometimes felt frustrated they were unable to show any progress to the Parole Board.
588. One man we interviewed told us he was being released "in a couple of days". He told us his case manager had been good and had involved his family in developing his release plan. He told us his case manager had organised a whānau hui in one of the Rimutaka Prison visits halls. The hui had been attended by three whānau members, the man's case manager, and his psychologist. The man told us he was aware of his release conditions and the requirements of his parole. He was being released to a whānau member's address.
589. However, another man we interviewed told us he had no release plan although he was also due for release soon. Neither he nor his family had had any discussions with his case manager regarding a release plan. He told us he had just been informed of his release conditions by his probation officer.
590. People serving longer prison sentences who have an identified reintegrative need and meet certain criteria⁷² can be considered for Guided Release. Case managers work more intensively with these people.
591. Rimutaka Prison had a dedicated Guided Release Case Manager at the site. We were told this case manager had completed 91 suitability assessments for Guided Release so far that year (i.e. January – November 2023), with 22 men being found suitable. COBRA records confirmed these numbers.
592. When men were found suitable, the Guided Release Case Manager completed the necessary paperwork, arranged activities and escorted them out of the prison if temporary releases were approved. The Guided Release Case Manager told us she had completed 37 Guided Release outings in the period July 2023 to early December 2023. Reasons for temporary releases included allowing men to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, visit a Community Corrections service centre, obtain a driver licence, visit a marae, attend a family/whānau event, or visit a release address.
593. The Release to Work programme allows minimum security prisoners who are assessed as suitable to leave prison during the day to engage in paid employment in the community.

⁷¹ The Kiwi Access Card, previously known as the 18+ Card, is a government recognised form of photographic ID and evidence of age card. It is managed by Hospitality New Zealand. Many prisoners have no form of ID which makes it difficult for them to secure basic services in the community such as banking, rental housing and employment, so assisting them to get this card is a useful reintegration service.

⁷² i.e. the criteria for Temporary Release specified in Regulation 26 of the Corrections Regulations 2005.

This helps prisoners gain employment on release. At the time of our inspection, no men at Rimutaka Prison were on Release to Work.

594. We spoke to several men in Unit 10 Rimu who had previously been living in the Self Care Unit and who had been on Release to Work. The Self Care Unit had been closed due to custodial staff shortages. The men felt they had "gone backwards". Some of the men told us they would need to reapply for Release to Work as the privilege had been taken away from them following a high-profile escape by a man from Rimutaka Prison in 2022.
595. All the men we spoke to in Unit 10 Rimu said they felt they needed to be doing Guided Release but that nothing much was happening.
596. Corrections intranet sets out that Bail Support Services is an opt-in service for people applying for bail or electronically monitored bail. Bail Support Services aim to help reduce the amount of time people spend remanded into custody and to connect them with programmes and services that will help them stay free of crime while on bail.
597. Case managers at Rimutaka Prison told us staff from Bail Support Services came onto the site three times a week to visit prisoners. Case managers told us this was a relatively new service and that it created pressure on the case management team as they were required to escort the Bail Support Services staff around the prison. Case management staff told us that escorting visitors was usually a job for custodial staff but that due to custodial staff shortages the job had been given to them without consultation. Case managers told us they did not have time to complete file reviews or risk assessments for all the people the Bail Support Services staff wanted to see.
598. As previously mentioned, the majority of prisoners we interviewed were not from the Wellington area. Most had likely been transferred away from their home regions due to nationwide prison network pressures. This meant most prisoners had no family/whānau nearby to assist in reintegration activities.
599. We observed a stock of new, non-prison-issue clothing and shoes in the Receiving Office. We were told staff could give items to prisoners being released if they did not have suitable clothes to wear. We were told the clothing had been donated by the Prison Chaplaincy.
600. Most prisoners told us they were able to keep up-to-date with news of the outside world by watching television and communicating with their families/whānau by letter or telephone.

Prison Staff

Inspection Standards

- All prison staff who work with prisoners have the necessary knowledge, skills and attitude, and are trained to work in line with professional and human rights standards.
- There is an adequate number of custodial staff to manage prisoners safely.
- Staff are good role models for prisoners and relationships between them are professional, positive and courteous.
- Prisoners have a dedicated member of staff who supports them to make positive changes in their lives.
- Prison staff include a sufficient number of specialists, which could include social workers, teachers, trade instructors, counsellors and psychologists.

601. As previously mentioned, Rimutaka Prison was operating under a Staffing Level Response Roster based on 80% of custodial staffing. Many staff across the prison expressed concern about the ongoing shortage of staff, which they told us had negative impacts on them and on the prisoners in their care. Staff told us prisoners were frustrated by the lack of programmes, activities and visits.
602. Custodial staff told us they were regularly short staffed. For example, on one of the days we visited, staff in one of the high security units had five custodial staff on shift (i.e. two staff on each wing and one in the guardroom) when they should have had seven. They told us this meant they had less time to spend with prisoners and less time to complete paperwork.
603. In a different high security unit, the situation was the same, with only five custodial staff when there should have been seven. The Principal Corrections Officer of this unit told us staff safety was taken very seriously at the site and that he reported to the Residential Manager regarding health and safety every day. During an informal interview we asked some custodial staff in this unit whether they felt safe at work. They told us they felt safe when they had enough staff on shift.
604. Some custodial staff told us they felt the "One Team" approach was not working well due to staff shortages. These custodial staff told us when another staff member, such as a case manager, came to the unit to see a prisoner, the custodial staff had to stop or disrupt the usual unit regime to facilitate the meeting. These custodial staff told us disrupting the regime was not always possible and other staff then had to wait and often became frustrated.
605. Custodial staff told us due to the shortage of staff the site relied on call-backs (i.e. staff being called in to cover extra shifts on their days off). Some staff in a high security unit told us originally they had been told they could only do call backs for half of their days off. However, this guidance had now "gone out the window" and they could do all the call backs they wanted. We heard this practice led to fatigue. Staff told us they were told by managers to have breaks but that the workload remained the same. They felt the site was relying a great deal on the goodwill of staff to get things done.
606. We observed a number of certificates of appreciation from the Prison Director displayed in custodial staff members' offices and guardrooms. Staff told us the Prison Director had issued these certificates in acknowledgement of work they had done and that this made them feel valued.

607. Most custodial staff we spoke with during the inspection were friendly and engaged and we observed many of them speaking with prisoners in a professional manner and attempting to deal with prisoners' requests. From our conversations with custodial staff across the site we observed they generally had a focus on safety and security.
608. Some custodial staff told us they felt under pressure due to changing routines and colleagues going off sick. They told us they could be deployed to a different unit with little notice (i.e. that day) and that this could be stressful. Some contractors and support staff we interviewed commented that custodial staff seemed "burnt out" or were looking for other jobs.
609. Some custodial staff told us there had been occasions when they had been instructed to implement a change to practice but had been given little or no information regarding the reasons for the change. For example, they told us there had been an instruction that they were to keep the observation flaps closed on all the cells in high security units. Staff told us they implemented the change but did not know the reason why and had no opportunity to raise their concerns regarding the effect it would have in the units. We note it is generally standard practice across the prison network to keep cell observation flaps closed when these are not in use.
610. We held a staff forum that was attended by five custodial staff from across the site. They told us they felt under stress and that there was no light at the end of the tunnel regarding the short staffing situation. They told us the new variable shift rosters were the heart of the problem, as these meant staff worked longer shifts (i.e. 12-hour shifts) and were separated into two separate teams which did not work together. They felt this led to inconsistencies in practice across the two teams. They felt the new shift patterns were one of the reasons why staff were leaving.
611. Staff at the forum told us they used to be given 48-hours' notice of a regime change and the details would be posted on the wall for prisoners. They told us now they were not given notice about regime changes. For example, they told us they had been given five minutes notice that day that there was going to be a "long lock". They told us the reason they were given for the "long lock" was that "the boss says so". They told us there were some good managers at the site but that others did not listen. They felt decision-making had moved "up the line" and that previously Principal Corrections Officers had made more decisions about the day-to-day running of a unit, but this was no longer the case. However, they told us some staff were "scared" to make decisions "because it comes back on them if things go wrong".
612. Staff at the forum also told us the lack of programmes, constructive activities and visits for prisoners was increasing tension. They did not know when prison visits might be starting up again.
613. We asked several custodial staff about training and they generally told us they were up to date with this. Several Principal Corrections Officers across the site told us that despite the short staffing situation, staff were encouraged to complete training if they were rostered onto it and would not generally be redeployed.
614. We interviewed the site Learning and Development Lead who told us the site was "a bit behind" with some training but was catching up. The Learning and Development Lead told us she onboarded all new Corrections Officer recruits who were completing the Corrections Officer Development Pathway. She told us 65 new recruits had started since February 2023, though 13 had since resigned and another was about to resign. She told us that in the Corrections Lower North region they were "very honest" on their recruitment days. She said all new recruits had to be able to communicate effectively in English.

615. We interviewed the Senior Advisor to the Prison Director who told us custodial staff turnover at the site was 38.8% which he felt was high.⁷³ We note that, for comparison, Corrections data⁷⁴ suggested national rates of turnover for custodial staff at 31 August 2023 was 13.8%. The Senior Advisor to the Prison Director told us there was a retention plan being developed, but he felt the high turnover may have been a symptom of a wider problem. He felt there were some cultural issues at the site and that the Prison Director was trying to restore integrity and safety by being very clear on requirements and expectations.
616. We interviewed the union representatives for the two main unions on site: the Corrections Association of New Zealand (CANZ) and the Public Service Association (PSA). The CANZ union representative told us union members told him they generally felt supported. He felt the site was managed well despite the staffing shortage and that the Prison Director held managers and Principal Corrections Officers to account. The CANZ representative told us union members' main concerns were the staffing shortages and the fact that a lot of custodial staff had less than two years of experience and did not know "what normal looks like" as they had only worked under a Staffing Level Response roster. The CANZ representative told us the current rostering system was "terrible" as it meant custodial staff were separated into two teams who never worked together.
617. The PSA union representative told us they had a good relationship with the Prison Director and the management team. The PSA representative told us his union members' main concerns were staffing levels and the Staffing Level Response roster; the classification of prisoners the prison was receiving; and double-bunking and the unlocking of prisoners in the high security part of the prison, particularly for new staff who were not long out of staff college. He told us he felt staff were doing a good job in the circumstances, but that not all of them felt safe. He told us his members told him the changes in regime were unsettling for both staff and prisoners, and that staff fatigue was an issue with all the overtime being worked. He told us the lack of programmes and constructive activities for prisoners was a huge issue and that levels of literacy and numeracy were "ridiculously low" amongst prisoners. We asked him if he felt Hōkai Rangi was well-understood at the site and he said it was not talked about and that there was not enough understanding about it.
618. We observed good relationships between custodial and clinical/therapy staff in Unit 9 (the Special Treatment Unit). Staff in this unit spoke highly of each other and were clearly engaged in the rehabilitation of the men.
619. The Principal Corrections Officer in Unit 9 (the Special Treatment Unit) told us custodial staff sometimes had their annual leave requests denied due to staff shortages and he felt this could lead to staff retiring earlier than they had planned. He also told us he had noticed an increase in staff not taking annual leave due to the 12-hour shifts (previously, prisons had had 8-hour shifts). He said staff felt they didn't need to take as much leave as they got more days off when doing 12-hour shifts. He said he was having more discussions with staff about high annual leave balances.
620. Custodial staff in Unit 10 (the High Dependency Unit) were managing prisoners with age-related health conditions or complex health and disability needs. Staff in this unit told us they received good support. They told us they talked to each other or could access a counsellor through the Corrections Employee Assistance Programme. They could also get support from the site Welfare Co-ordinator and Post Incident Response Team officers.

⁷³ Rimutaka Strategic Plan 2023.

⁷⁴ Corrections data services portal.

621. We spoke with the Principal Corrections Officer in the Intervention and Support Unit who said there was a good level of experience in the team, including two staff who had 30 years of service. At the time of our visit, the Principal Corrections Officer told us the unit was short-staffed by one staff member, but that the Site Emergency Response Team would come to the unit to assist if they needed extra staff to unlock someone safely. Staff in the unit received ongoing mindfulness training, a one-day reflective supervision/practice course, and support from clinicians from the Intervention and Support Practice Team who discussed any issues of prisoner management with them.
622. The Principal Corrections Officer in the Management Unit told us they were generally fully staffed otherwise they were unable to unlock prisoners. We heard that all staff in the unit worked there permanently; staff from other units were not rostered in. The average length of service for custodial staff working in the unit was two-and-a-half years. Staff in the unit received ongoing information and training about the care and management of prisoners from clinicians from the Intervention and Support Practice Team and the Improving Mental Health Clinicians.
623. The Operations Support Manager for the site told us there was a fortnightly forum for Principal Corrections Officers with the Deputy Prison Director, and that they were working on setting up a forum for Senior Corrections Officers. There were no other staff forums taking place, though the Operations Support Manager told us the Prison Director and two Deputy Prison Directors had an open-door policy and staff were encouraged to speak up if they had any concerns.
624. The Custodial Systems Manager and Operations Support Manager told us the site was focusing on compliance for areas including complaints, inductions, cell standards and searching, and we observed these areas being raised at the daily staff briefing. The Operations Support Manager told us part of his role was to observe these tasks on the units and provide assurance to the Prison Director that staff were improving and maintaining standards in these areas.
625. Prisoners we interviewed across the site told us most custodial staff were approachable and respectful, and assisted them with their needs. Most prisoners told us most staff would chat if they had time, and that some would engage by playing chess, table tennis or other similar activities.
626. A few prisoners told us some custodial staff members were "lazy" or "didn't care" or would promise to do things and not do them. A few prisoners in some units told us they felt some custodial staff were "power crazy" or "let power go to their heads". One prisoner told us he felt new staff were the worst as they were "greenhorns" and did things by the book, whereas the more experienced staff understood the unit better and talked more to the prisoners.
627. Prisoners generally told us that few senior managers were visible. Prisoners in some units told us they saw the Principal Corrections Officer regularly. We observed that prisoners in Unit 8 knew the Principal Corrections Officer and the Residential Manager by name which indicated that those staff were visible in that unit. However, most prisoners told us they did not regularly see any staff more senior than a Principal Corrections Officer or a Residential Manager. Most prisoners told us they had never or had only seldom seen the Deputy Prison Directors or the Prison Director.

Health staff

628. As previously mentioned, the health team at Rimutaka Prison was significantly short-staffed with only 20.6 FTE registered nurses in the team out of 35.2 FTE budgeted positions. Due to this situation, the Health Centre Manager and Assistant Health Centre Managers were

working “on the floor” as nurses themselves, as well as fulfilling their roles as managers. They often attended to managerial tasks at the end of the day, having already done eight hours of clinical work with prisoners.

629. The Clinical Inspector spoke with a group of nine nurses who told her the workload was high (“tougher than COVID”) and that they felt burned out, rushed and unsafe. They were unable to describe many successes or positive aspects of the job, though some said it was positive there were no night shifts required. Morale was very low, but peer support was high. They described being there “for each other”, and “for the tāne (i.e. the men)”. They appreciated that their managers were supporting them “on the floor”, but they felt they just needed more nurses. They said they hadn’t had staff meetings for some time.
630. The nurses told the Clinical Inspector that relationships with custodial staff were not as good as they had been. They now had to request custodial staff to observe consultations in the health centre, and some nurses said they felt unsafe. In addition, they said sometimes, mostly at weekends, it was difficult to do medications rounds because custodial staff were not available to accompany them. They said there was a mismatch between the hours worked by custodial staff and the hours worked by nurses. This could be problematic for medication administration.
631. The nurses told us they experienced a lot of verbal abuse from prisoners, and one nurse described having water thrown at him by a patient.
632. During an interview, the Health Centre Manager and one of the two Assistant Health Centre Managers told us that nurses could access either one-to-one or group clinical supervision, either face-to-face or online. They told us all the nurses were up-to-date with cardio-pulmonary resuscitation training and were being rotated through some new training on deteriorating patients.
633. Nurses were also supposed to attend primary mental health training (including initial and refresher training). However, the Regional Clinical Director told us some nurses at Rimutaka Prison would not be able to complete this training in the specified timeframe due to the shortage of nursing staff.
634. Nurses were able to apply for post-graduate study and relevant conferences or courses that would improve health service delivery to prisoners.

Other staff

635. We interviewed the Manager Psychological Services who told us staff in Unit 9 (the Special Treatment Unit) included psychologists, programme facilitators, a reintegration coordinator, a Kaupapa Māori practitioner, an administration officer and a manager. She told us they had a good relationship with custodial staff in the unit, and with the Deputy Prison Director and Prison Director. She told us when new custodial staff came to work in the unit the programme staff would talk with them and provide them with information about the rehabilitative aims of the Men with Violent Offending programme.
636. We interviewed the Principal Programme Facilitator for the site who told us her team was not allowed to enter the site to run programmes or liaise with case managers due to custodial staff shortages. She said this meant her team’s relationship with custodial staff was non-existent, though they used to have good relationships. The Principal Programme Facilitator told us she felt the site’s Violence and Aggression Plan had taken over everything else and that the focus was now only on security. She said people did not realise that programmes would help the site regarding security. She felt denying prisoners access to programmes was

- contributing to poor outcomes, including men not being considered for parole as they had not completed any rehabilitation programmes.
637. The Principal Programme Facilitator said her team used to feel they were a part of the site's 'One Team' approach but did not feel like this anymore. She told us there was a lack of communication from site management.
638. We spoke with three Education Tutors who told us the Learning and Interventions Delivery Manager was good and gave them support as needed. They said previously there were job competencies for tutors to meet but that there were not many guidelines. The Education Tutors said custodial staff were "tired and worn out but they still get the work done".
639. There is an Intelligence Team at Rimutaka Prison that reports to the Manager Regional Intelligence. As part of the inspection we interviewed the three members of team, including an Intelligence Officer and an Intelligence Analyst. The team told us they felt there was some tension between the humanising and healing aims of Hōkai Rangi and their duties regarding trans-national organised crime.
640. The Intelligence Team told us they attended the Safer Custody meetings and the 8am morning briefings. They told us they supplied information to prison management but felt they did not get much information in return. They told us they found it difficult to know what their direction and priorities were.
641. We interviewed nine staff from Upper Hutt Community Corrections at a staff forum. Staff attending included Service Managers, Probation Officers, and Senior Practitioners. They told us access to prisoners could be an issue, with prison staff often not prioritising prisoners' meetings with probation officers. They told us they felt prison staff did not always understand the importance of probation officers being able to interview prisoners to write pre-sentence Provision of Advice to Courts (PAC) reports.
642. The Community Corrections staff told us they could often only interview prisoners when they were unlocked, which was unfair as prisoners had to use their unlock time for other activities such as exercise and making telephone calls to family/whānau. In addition, the Community Corrections staff said privacy could be an issue during interviews. The conversations they had with prisoners were sometimes very sensitive, covering such issues as childhood sexual abuse, so privacy was required.
643. The Community Corrections staff told us that pre-COVID-19, probation officers had conducted all interviews, including PAC report interviews, face-to-face with prisoners, but that in the 2023 year they had only conducted two face-to-face PAC report interviews, and that this was because a judge had ordered it.
644. The Community Corrections District Manager told us in an interview that when there had been prisoners that staff had really needed to see, the Prison Director's Senior Advisor had been supportive.

Appendix A – Images



Image 1: Full body scanner in Receiving Office.

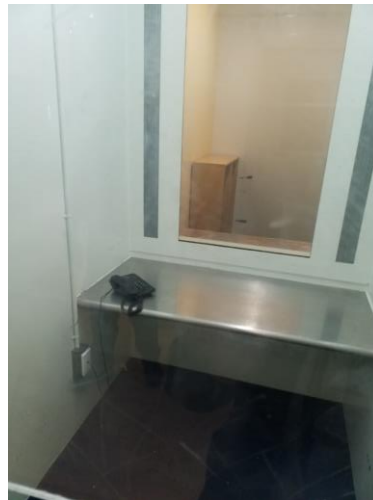


Image 2: Non-contact interview room in high security unit. Note, no chair for prisoner.

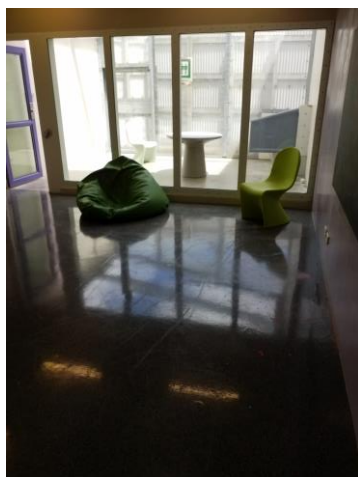


Image 3: ISU dayroom and exercise yard.



Image 4: Interior of high security unit showing communal area with seating and table tennis.

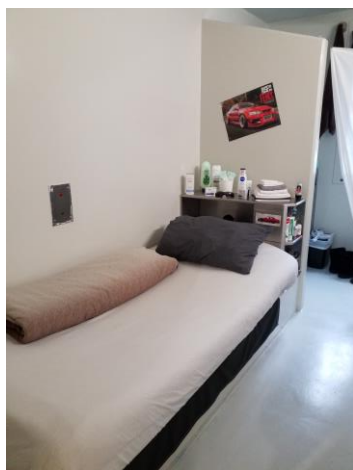


Image 5: Cell in high security unit.



Image 6: Exercise yard in high security unit.



Image 7: Exercise yard in high security unit with no cover from the weather.



Image 8: Cell in low security unit.



Image 9: Well-maintained compound in low security unit.

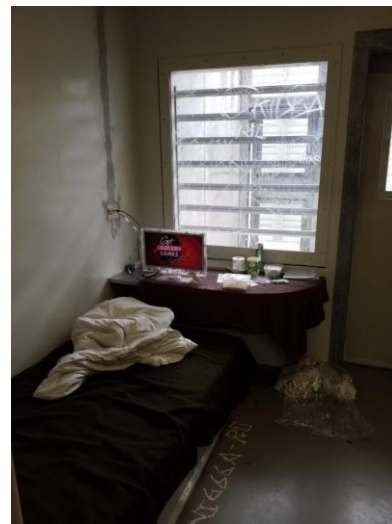


Image 10: Cell in Management Unit with graffiti.



Image 11: High Dependency Unit corridor.



Image 12: High Dependency Unit outdoor area with seating and shade-cloths.



Image 13: Evening meal and supper.

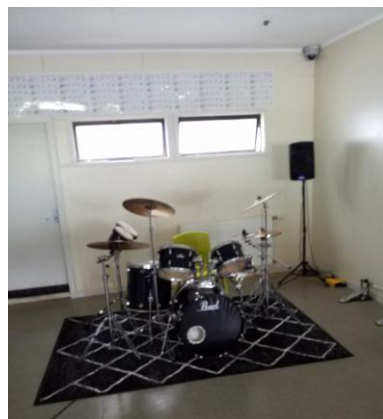


Image 14: Drum set in the Special Treatment Unit recreation room.



Image 15: Prison kitchen.



Image 16: Prison Printshop.

Appendix B – Corrections' response



17 September 2024

Russell Underwood
Acting Chief Inspector
Department of Corrections

By email: russell.underwood@corrections.govt.nz

Tēnā koe Russell

Re: Draft Report on Rimutaka Prison Inspection 2-8 December 2023

On behalf of Corrections, thank you for the opportunity to respond to the draft inspection report for Rimutaka Prison. Prison inspections play an important role in building a culture of continuous improvement for Corrections.

We would like to acknowledge the Inspection team for their professional and supportive approach during this inspection in 2023. The report was a fair representation of Rimutaka Prison, acknowledging the challenges and opportunities the site faces. There are some clear indicators of areas for improvement which align with the organisational goal of improving the lives and outcomes of the people in our prisons.

Your report highlighted a number of positive practices at the prison, such as the effective use of the full body scanner technology in the Receiving Office, a commendable quality of service delivered by the health team, and people in Te Whare Manaakitanga being able to access a range of rehabilitative and constructive activities, with staff in the unit working collaboratively and having positive interactions with people in prison.

The report identified a lack of consistent leadership at Rimutaka Prison, with several Acting Prison Directors (now General Managers) within a four-year period. The most recent General Manager Custody has been in the role since May 2022 and has been confirmed to continue in his role until at least August 2026, to ensure consistency. We can also advise the Health Centre Manager is included in the Senior Management Team and enables a multi-disciplinary approach for managing the needs of those in Rimutaka Prison.

Corrections continues to adapt to the changing needs of people in prison, including a change in demographics with a higher proportion of people on remand. Work is underway at Rimutaka Prison to introduce remand-focussed constructive activities, and in August 2024, Rimutaka Prison opened a low

security modular unit which accommodates remand prisoners using the Remand Management Tool.

We note the concerns regarding both health and custodial staff shortages, and the impact on the health and wellbeing of staff and people in prison. It was pleasing to see staff acknowledged within your report for their hard work and dedication. Rimutaka Prison transitioned to the Staffing Level Response (SLR) Roster as a result of custodial staffing shortages in September 2022, and Corrections continues to make a concerted effort to recruit, retain, and train frontline health, rehabilitation and custodial staff. Since this inspection, Rimutaka Prison health, rehabilitation, and custodial staffing numbers have increased significantly, with custodial staffing levels expected to be full by March 2025.

Pae Ora have implemented a dedicated recruitment team, with regional support for interviews, and surge support staff for temporary relief. Nursing vacancies have reduced from 20.6 FTE to 6.6 FTE, with two new starters confirmed for September. Rimutaka Prison management alongside Pae Ora leaders, continue to work closely with staff and the unions to focus on staff retention activities, including wellness days, access to EAP, violence prevention, and the regular presence of the Staff Welfare Coordinator.

Rimutaka Prison has formed a multi-disciplinary team to regularly assess their capacity to resume rehabilitation and reintegration activities, which were paused when the SLR roster was implemented, for the site to focus on the delivery of minimum entitlements. The team has approved the resumption of over 100 activities, either as ongoing or a 'one-off' service, including reintegration providers, kaiwhakamana, counsellors, and various volunteers.

Since your inspection, whānau visits have resumed and are held twice per week, with a current proposal for this to be expanded. Contact with whānau via Audio Visual Link remains a useful tool for people in prison with whānau based in other regions who are unable to travel to Wellington for an in-person visit.

Pae Ora and Custodial staff are working together to improve programme facilitation at Rimutaka Prison. So far, two Short Rehabilitation Programmes have been delivered this year, one Medium Intensity Rehabilitation Programme (MIRP) is in progress, and two further MIRPs are scheduled to start before the end of the year.

Our Infrastructure team are working with the site to continuously identify opportunities to improve the facilities and environment. Within your report, you identify that people housed in the Intervention and Support Unit (ISU) had little to do, which is not conducive to a therapeutic environment. Corrections is working to address this, and is implementing televisions in ISUs across the country, including Rimutaka Prison. This will support the improvement of the physical environment, promote positive mental health, and support the rehabilitation process. It is estimated this project will be completed in 2028.

We acknowledge there is a high proportion of people in prison who identify as Māori, and expansion of cultural support, in addition to the Kaiwhakamana access now occurring, is a priority in the next phase of activity reintroduction at Rimutaka Prison. Where it is possible, the Pou Arataki at Rimutaka Prison will support staff in their interpersonal interactions with Māori prisoners, and their understanding and awareness of Māori approaches.

Overall, the inspection report recognises the positive work at Rimutaka Prison while acknowledging there are areas for further improvement. This includes providing a healthier environment for both people in prison and staff. Determinations about priorities and actions will be a joint approach led by the General Manager at Rimutaka Prison, and the General Manager Pae Ora.

Please advise if you have any concerns or questions about the information provided.

Ngā mihi nui



Leigh Marsh
Commissioner Custodial Services



Dr Juanita Ryan
Deputy Chief Executive Pae Ora