






# Office of the Inspector of Prisons (OIP)

## Information for prisoners

This booklet tells you about the Office of the Inspector of Prisons.

It describes:

-  our values and vision
-  the work we do
-  how to contact us





## What is the Office of the Inspector of Prisons?

We are an independent prison oversight body. This means we visit prisons to make sure they follow Irish law and international human rights standards. We share the findings of our prison inspections and investigations with the prison, the Minister for Justice, the Irish prison service and the public.

We work separately from the Irish Prison Service and other government departments and agencies. We consider many issues about prisoners and prisons, but we do not consider individual serious complaints like those described on page 8. You can contact us if you have an issue you want us to know about (page 7). We may investigate circumstances around it during our inspections.

Our team includes experts in human rights, healthcare, investigations and prison research, policy and reform.

Currently, the Office of the Inspector of Prisons is led by a chief inspector who works alongside senior inspectors, inspectors, a data analyst and administration staff.



## OIP values and vision

We inspect and investigate prisons and share information about treatment and conditions in Irish prisons with the general public. We write reports and make recommendations based on our inspections and investigations. We examine prisons in Ireland to see if they live up to human rights standards set out in Irish and international law.

### **Our main goals are to:**

- promote equality and human rights,
- improve how prisons are managed and operated,
- provide information about our role, and
- share information about the treatment and conditions in prisons with the Minister for Justice, who makes it available to the public.



## What we do

- Inspect Irish prisons
- Investigate prisoner deaths
- Reply to confidential letters we get from prisoners (Rule 44 Letters explained on page 7)
- Oversee very serious complaints (Category A complaints – Rule 57B) explained on page 8)

The following sections tell you more about each of these areas. We use 'Rule' numbers to refer to the rules in the Irish Prison Rules.

# 1. Inspect prisons

Our main work is to inspect the 12 prisons in Ireland to make sure that you are treated with respect, and that your human rights are protected.

**When we come to the prisons we check a lot of things, such as:**

**You are safe, respected and your health needs are being met**

- You are safe in prison
- You are treated with respect
- Your healthcare needs are met

**Your cell and the prison is clean**

- The prison is kept clean at all times
- You are given shower gel and shampoo
- You have proper cleaning products to clean your cell
- You are warm in your cell and the food is okay

**You can make a complaint**

- You can make a complaint if you wish and it is easy for you to do this (This means you can easily get a complaint form to fill in, and that you are told what happened to your complaint.)

**You can take part in activities and meet others**

- You can go to the yard or recreation area and can mix with other prisoners
- You can attend school and workshops if you want to

## What an inspection looks like

The OIP inspection team decides how long or short inspections will be. Short inspections can last between one and three days. General inspections can take about two weeks. When the inspection team is in the prison, you are welcome to speak to them on the landings or by asking a member of the team to speak to them in private.

To understand how the prison is operating, the inspection team will use the following methods:

- interviews/discussions with prisoners and staff,
- surveys with prisoners and staff,
- observation, and
- study of documents.

The team will also want to know about the experience of people in prison, those working in the prison and visitors.

Below we explain each of these methods.

## Our inspection methods



### **Interviews and discussions**

During an inspection, the inspection team will try to speak to as many prisoners, staff and visitors as possible. All interviews and discussions that take place between our team and staff and prisoners are confidential. However, if you tell an inspector about a plan to harm yourself or others, the inspector will have to report this to the Governor and/or An Garda Síochána (the Irish police).



## **Surveys**

During an inspection, we may ask you and staff to complete a survey. These surveys help us learn about your views of the prison. You complete the survey on a computer tablet, and your answers are completely anonymous. This means no one will be able to connect your survey answers back to you.

You don't have to do the survey if you don't want to.



## **Observation**

During an inspection, we will go to all areas of the prison to see how well prisons are following Irish law and international human rights standards. We will look at (observe) the prison facilities, so you will see our inspectors on the landings.

We will look at things like how the school is run, how the healthcare system works and how the prison operates.



## **Study of documents**

Our inspection team will gather and review documents before, during and after an inspection. We review documents such as the record books and education materials. This allows us to see how the prison is operating.

## **Report and monitor**

After we inspect a prison, we write a report. The report may contain recommendations for how to improve treatment and conditions in the prison. Our recommendations are not legally binding. Our draft reports are sent to the Irish Prison Service. This allows it to respond and to develop an action plan to carry out recommendations if needed. We check to see if the action plans are carried out.

The Office of the Inspector send reports to the Minister for Justice. These reports are published by the Minister and shared on our website for the public to read. We will also share the findings with the prison.

## **2. Investigate prisoner deaths**

Another important part of our work is to examine the circumstances around a prisoner's death. We do not determine the cause of death because the coroner (independent medical expert) does this. We investigate all deaths that happen in prison or while a prisoner is on temporary release if a death happened within one month of their release. We use our investigation findings to highlight ways to keep you safe.

We also make sure that we meet the family of the deceased to hear any concerns they may have. We take these concerns into account as part of the investigation.



### **3. Reply to confidential letters we get from prisoners (Rule 44 Letters)**

You have a right to write to us (Inspector of Prisons) about any matter you want to raise, in the strictest of confidence. This means that, by law, the Irish Prison Service:

- should not read any letters you send to us, and
- must send your unopened letter to us without delay.

Our contact details are at the end of this booklet.



We will write back to you in a sealed envelope. On the envelope, we will write Rule 44, and we ask the Governor to ensure the letter is delivered to you unopened. The law allows the Governor to open a Rule 44 letter. But, you must be there with them when they do this. A letter should only be opened to check that it has come from the Inspector's office. (A Rule 44 letter is one of the rules in the Irish Prison Rules.)

## **4. Oversee very serious complaints (Category A complaints – Rule 57B)**

The Office of the Inspector of Prisons examines the process for how the Irish Prison Service manages the most serious complaints. These serious complaints are called Category A complaints, and we list them below.

By law, if you want to complain about any of these serious complaints, you must complain directly to the Irish Prison Service using a complaints form or by telling a member of prison staff your complaint. The Irish Prison Service will ask an independent investigator to examine your complaint.

We do not investigate individual prisoner complaints, but the Irish Prison Service must give us information about Category A complaints. We may use the information we learn from complaints to help plan inspections.

You can make a very serious complaint about alleged behaviour against you or another prisoner. Reasons to make a Category A complaint include:

- assault or use of excessive force against a prisoner, or
- ill-treatment,
- racial abuse,
- discrimination,
- intimidation,
- threats, or
- behaviour that is so serious it may harm the reputation of (discredit) the Irish Prison Service.



## How to contact us (OIP)

### **Mailing address:**

Office of the Inspector of Prisons

24 Cecil Walk, Kenyon Street

Nenagh

Co Tipperary

E45 NN73

To learn more about us, you can visit our website: **[www.oip.ie](http://www.oip.ie)**



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OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR OF PRISONS

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