

# Chief Ombudsman calls for Whanganui Prison to urgently address inmate violence and intimidation

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Chief Ombudsman Peter Boshier is calling on Whanganui Prison to take urgent steps to curb violence and intimidation among inmates at the facility.

The Chief Ombudsman's report has been tabled in Parliament this afternoon, after his inspectors made a full, unannounced inspection of Whanganui Prison in February.

Mr Boshier says his inspectors found generally positive interactions between staff and prisoners. "Prison staff described the level of co-operation between groups as 'better than in some other places'. This was valued as pressures resulting from increased prisoner numbers were identified as raising stress and fatigue issues for staff."

"We found case managers provided a timely and satisfactory level of service to their prisoners and prisoner admissions were carried out in a calm and measured manner."

Accommodation was generally clean and well maintained in all but two complexes. The ventilation in both high and low-security units was acknowledged as inadequate.

Overall, health services were fit for purpose and staff believed the addition of mental health clinicians would provide them with more support. However, there was little evidence of care planning for patients with complex, long-term conditions.

Mr Boshier says another area requires immediate attention.

"I consider there is a clear and urgent need for the Prison to address the levels of violence and intimidation."

Mr Boshier found there was a high number of violent incidents notified each month, and this has been increasing. Two of the Prison's units had the highest number of recorded assaults of all the Department of Corrections' lower north region facilities.

He says that levels of violence and intimidation are likely to be even higher. Our survey of prisoners showed that 71 percent of them would not report incidents. Common reasons for not doing so included a perception that gangs are in control and that reporting would cause them even more difficulties.

“Prisoners fear for their safety so they don’t report the stand-over tactics or bullying they experience from other inmates, yet they tell my inspectors that these are common occurrences. My inspectors also observed that incidents, like fighting, sparring and unexplained injuries, have increased since the last inspections.”

He says the Prison did not have an active gang management strategy in place, although the Prison Director confirmed he was in the process of developing one.

Mr Boshier says this was surprising given that more than forty per cent of the prisoners were either gang members or associates.

“My Inspectors concluded that the pervasive influence of gangs at the Prison was having a detrimental effect on both prisoners and staff. Without a localised, focussed gang strategy, perpetrators of violence will continue to bully and intimidate while victims are routinely disadvantaged.”

The Chief Ombudsman’s report on Whanganui Prison is available [here](#).

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## More information

New Zealand signed up to the United Nations’ Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) in 2007.

The Chief Ombudsman is a ‘National Preventive Mechanism’ under OPCAT, meaning he inspects prisons and other places of detention (like health and disability facilities) to ensure they meet human rights standards and don’t subject detainees to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. When appropriate, he makes recommendations to improve the treatment and conditions of detainees (including prisoners).

The inspectors examine the facilities and treatment of prisoners against six criteria: Treatment; Lawful custody; Decency, dignity and respect; Health and wellbeing; Protective measures; and Purposeful activity and transition to the community.

### The facility

Whanganui Prison (previously known as Kaitoke Prison) is one of the Department of Corrections’ Lower North Region facilities. The Prison incorporates the New Plymouth Remand Centre, which is co-located with the Police Station in New Plymouth. It has a total of 581 beds (281 high-security, 300 low-security). At the time of the inspection, there were 573 inmates.

	Whanganui Prison	New Plymouth Remand Centre
<b>Location</b>	About 7km south east of Whanganui, near Kaitoke	Co-located with the Police Station, New Plymouth
<b>Operating capacity</b>	557 beds in 8 complexes	24 beds
<b>Accommodates</b>	Men with security classification ranging from minimum to high	Men, women and youth waiting to attend New Plymouth Court or transferred to Whanganui Prison.
<b>This inspection</b>	12 – 19 February 2018	20-21 March 2018
<b>Previous inspection</b>	June 2011	March 2017

Find out more about our role in examining and monitoring places of detention, and read our other OPCAT reports, at: [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz). You can also follow us on Facebook: @ombudsmannz.