

Media release: Inspector of Custodial Services releases report on Shortland Correctional Centre and Cessnock Correctional Centre

14 June 2024

The Inspector of Custodial Services (ICS) has released a report on the inspections of Shortland Correctional Centre (male, maximum security) and Cessnock Correctional Centre (male, minimum security). Both facilities are located on the Cessnock Correctional Complex, 151km northwest of Sydney.

We found that much had changed since our last inspection of Cessnock CC in 2018. Cessnock CC had been divided into two centres, Cessnock CC and Shortland CC. Both centres had increased their capacity with the addition of new accommodation units and had modern health, employment, programs, education and visit facilities.

The new infrastructure is in stark contrast to the original part of Cessnock CC which opened in 1974. Today it is unsafe and unfit for purpose. We found its condition and design to be so poor that no realistic amount of refurbishment and repair can fix it. Corrective Services NSW has already closed two of the four accommodation wings. We commend this but do not think this decision goes far enough. This report recommends the closure of all the original 1974 infrastructure and the amalgamation of the two correctional centres.

Amalgamation would resolve several key issues identified in the report, including staff shortages, lockdowns, insufficient education and employment for prisoners, inefficient access to health services, and the separation and confinement of prisoners when their security classifications are regressed.

Of concern, both centres were failing to deliver criminogenic programs to many of their sentenced prisoners including their violent offender and sex offender cohorts. Shortland CC is one of the few centres where the Violent Offender Therapeutic Program is meant to operate.

Shortland CC had the highest per capita rates of assaults between prisoners in NSW in 2021/22. Corrective Services NSW needs to do more to address the underlying causes of the violence as they have a duty of care to both their staff and people in custody. High levels of illicit drug use, limited access to programs, employment, education, and inadequate support for people with mental health issues were no doubt contributing to the high rates of assault.

Much more also needs to be done to connect the significant populations of Aboriginal people at both centres with their culture, though it was pleasing to see first steps being taken in 2023.

In total, the report makes 91 recommendations aimed at improving the conditions and treatment of people in custody and improving staff professional practice and safety.

The ICS was established in October 2013 to provide independent oversight of the NSW custodial system. The ICS is required to inspect each adult custodial facility in NSW every five years and may also examine and review any custodial service at any time. The ICS must report to the NSW Parliament on each such inspection, examination, or review.

The report is available at: <https://inspectorcustodial.nsw.gov.au/reports-and-publications/inspection-reports/adult-reports/shortland-and-cessnock-correctional-centres.html>