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Audit finds prisoners given the opportunity to improve literacy and numeracy in custody

The Auditor General's report on [Improving Prisoner Literacy and Numeracy](#) has tabled in Parliament today.

The audit assessed whether the Department of Justice effectively addresses the literacy and numeracy needs of adult prisoners.

Auditor General Ms Caroline Spencer said prisoner needs are identified effectively and the Department creates and delivers education to meet these needs.

'However, there are opportunities for the Department to improve how it measures the impact of, and to encourage greater participation in, its education courses,' Ms Spencer said.

'There are multiple constraints that can limit prisoners' ability to attend and fully participate in education courses such as limited capacity of classes, lack of teaching staff, and education not being rewarded as highly as some other work activities in the prison.

'The Department should address these issues so prisoners can improve their literacy and numeracy skills, which will help them engage effectively in everyday life and reduce their chances of reoffending,' she said.

Over 3 years the Department delivered about 24,000 literacy and numeracy courses to over 11,000 prisoners but it did not reassess their skills on completion, so it does not know if the courses were effective.

The importance of literacy courses is evident as the audit found over one third of the prisoners assessed can only read clear familiar information and may need to read words by sounding out letters. For Aboriginal prisoners, this rose to nearly 55%.

Ms Spencer said although the Department does not have a primary role to educate prisoners, it is a positive way that prisoners can spend their time. It is also a way in which the Department can proactively reduce the risks that prisoners will reoffend.

The report recommends the Department investigates and mitigates challenges that prevent or discourage prisoners from attending classes.

Report resources

- [PDF version](#)
- [summary video](#)