

THE PRINCIPLE OF NORMALITY

- Less criminality
- Safer society

The principle of normality is an important principle in implementation of punishments as set out in Chapter 3.5 of report to the Storting number 37 (2007-2008).

This means that:

- detention is the punishment, and the punishment should not be more burdensome than is necessary on the grounds of security,
- as a general rule, inmates and inmate should not be subject to supplementary punishments by being deprived of benefits, such as the opportunity for social contact through visits, furlough and telephone contact, and being permitted to follow developments in society through access to mass media.
- employees in the correctional and administrative collaborative agencies should be role models of good behaviour and should provide feedback in a way that corresponds with what inmates will encounter in the community.

The wide open, green spaces dampen the institutional character of the prison, and have a positive impact on mental health. "The ambition is that inmates should be able to move freely around the area," says Deputy Governor Jan Strømnes.



Like life on the outside

“Quite simply, we make daily life inside these walls as similar to life outside as we can without compromising security,” says Deputy Governor Jan Strømnes.

This means that inmates must leave the building where they live to go to work or school, to seek out health services, etc.

“The distances between the buildings aren’t big, but they’re enough to enable us to copy the rhythms of normal life. These are small but important elements for ensuring that inmates manage on their own.”

This also ensures that the harmful effects of time in prison are reduced and it facilitates good progression in the rehabilitation process.

“It would probably have been operationally and logistically easier to manage if everything was in the same building, but it wouldn’t have been normal,” he points out.

Move freely

The ambition in the long run is that inmates should be able to move more freely and alone in the large outdoor areas in the prison.

“We have interviewed former inmates, who said they missed precisely that freedom of movement. I don’t see any major issues with implementing as long as we grant furlough. There is also a certain risk factor present. It’s about giving them trust and opportunities. If they abuse that trust, they lose their privileges.”

The external environment was an important element during the planning and design of Halden Prison, with much of the terrain and vegetation to be kept.”

“We normally live surrounded by nature, why shouldn’t this be the case when people are serving a prison sentence?” asks Strømnes.

He does not deny that many argue that there is so much in the way of trees and vegetation that it prevents clear lines of sight. But he points out that the advantages far outweigh the downsides: not least

that access to nature is positive for mental health, and removes the sense of institutionalisation.

“The green spaces definitely provide the prison with a positive additional dimension in terms of carrying out sentences,” he emphasises.

Treating them with respect

As a natural part of the principle of normality, employees should treat inmate with respect and kindness.

“But these can be criminals who have caused others great suffering and sorrow. Do they deserve this kind of respect?”

“I understand why many would ask that question. The judiciary has sentenced them to detention, which is their punishment. The implementation of the punishment shouldn’t be characterised by revenge - it should be about encouraging change by providing them with more skills and abilities than they arrived with. In that arrangement, respect and trust are watchwords.”

“From an ethical perspective, they deserve respect even if they have committed an unforgivable act. It is about human rights, where human inviolability is at the heart of it.”

“What about the emotional issues?”

“It’s possible I might feel differently if I were the relative of a victim of crime. But criminal justice can’t be based on emotions,” he reasons.

Many prejudices

A major challenge is that it is far from given that they will encounter the same respect on the day they complete their sentence and return to the local community.

“There are many prejudices out there. Not least in the world of work, where many are sceptical about what kind of person an inmate is and they are reluctant to hire them. This is why it is important to demystify it and remind them that inmates are more than their previous criminal acts, possibly committed while intoxicated or in anger.”

“These are people like you and I, with feelings, ambitions and dreams in life. These are people who have served their sentence. The last thing they need is to be judged by society when starting over.”

“Everyone deserves that chance,” says Deputy Governor Jan Strømnes.



For those inmates who want lasting change, everything is in place to make sure they get it. Naturally, society should be protected from those who are dangerous or have no intention of changing their criminal behaviour,” says Strømnes.

Prisons sentences involve a loss of freedom, but prison inmates retain the same rights as other Norwegian citizens, with the exception of the loss of freedom.