

# Child prison is most violent in Britain

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A children's jail has been branded the most violent prison in the country by the watchdog.

Charlie Taylor, chief inspector of prisons, said he was "very concerned" at how much Feltham A young offender institution, which holds children aged between 15 and 18, had deteriorated in the past two years. It came after figures indicated there was six times more violence at the prison, in Middlesex, than at one of the most violent adult jails in England and Wales.

The watchdog found there were 410 violent incidents at Feltham A within a 12-month period from 84 children, equating to a rate of 488 incidents per 100 children. By contrast, the latest inspection of HMP Bedford, one of the most violent adult prisons, found the rate of violence was calculated at 80.6 incidents per 100 prisoners.

In a report published today Taylor said: "It was disappointing to return to find there had been a deterioration in

standards with levels of violence now the highest of any prison in the country." Inspectors found high levels of violence and rising self-harm when they visited Feltham A in March.

Meanwhile, John Bercow, the former House of Commons Speaker, is set to run a public speaking course to prisoners in HMP Pentonville, in Islington, north London, chairing debates and teaching the projection of his notorious call for "order".

Bercow will teach a group of between 12 and 20 prisoners on a six-week course starting in September.

As 1,100 out of the 1,200 prisoners at the category B prison are on remand, Bercow said the course could help inmates prepare for an appeal, a parole board or later a job interview.

"It's a soft skill and can be taught. Anybody can be taught to do it," Bercow told The Times at the prison yesterday. "I'm someone who is very keen to see people have a starting point. I'm not coming to Pentonville to judge anybody." Asked if his course might include

his notorious projection of "order", Bercow said: "I might even treat them to that."

The course was revealed during an open day by Friends of Pentonville, which raised £300,000 for educational and rehabilitation courses in the prison.

Jonathan Aitken, founder of Friends of Pentonville, praised the "inspired appointment" of James Timpson as minister for prisons, telling visitors: "The winds of change have been blowing through the bars of all our prisoners."

On Labour's new measure to release prisoners at 40 per cent of their sentence, Taylor said: "Anything which reduces the prison population is a good thing as far as we're concerned.

"Ultimately prisons only fulfil their public protection duty if they make people less likely to offend when they come out. And my worry is that at the moment with the current pressures on the system, many prisons will not be able to do that part of their job."

**Releasing prisoners early ignores driver of crime, Melanie Phillips, page 24**