



## **Children in custody 2021–22**

An analysis of 12–18-year-olds' perceptions of their experiences in secure training centres and young offender institutions

January 2023

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## Foreword

The surveys carried out on the day of arrival at each establishment are an essential part of the inspections carried out by HM Inspectorate of Prisons. In establishments holding children, these surveys give us a clear indication of what they think about their treatment and the conditions in which they are held. This report covers the first year of survey results gathered since the pandemic. It outlines the impact of the decisions that leaders took to keep children held in young offender institutions (YOI) and secure training centres (STC) safe from the virus.

The effect of the response to the pandemic and the slow recovery from the restrictions can be seen in all four of our healthy prison tests for children's establishments – safety, care, purposeful activity and resettlement. In YOIs the reduction in the population and smaller social groups had given staff more time to build relationships with children. They were now more likely to report feeling cared for and treated with respect than before the pandemic. These improved relationships are particularly positive given that children in custody rely on staff for every aspect of their daily life. It is also notable that children's perceptions of safety are the best they have been since we introduced the survey in 2001. This progress is welcome but there is still some way to go to make sure every child feels safe and cared for during their time in custody. While the rate of violence remained lower than before the COVID-19 pandemic, it increased in 2021-22 (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/safety-in-the-children-and-young-people-secure-estate-update-to-march-2022>).

This report outlines how gains in key areas like safety and care – which should be celebrated – have been made at the expense of children's progress in their education or their ability to see friends and family. The more limited access to visits was concerning given the impact that maintaining contact with support networks in the community has on resettlement outcomes. This trade off was completely avoidable. At HMYOI Parc, in South Wales, we judged outcomes to be good, our highest grade, in all areas. At the time of our inspection time out of cell and education provision in the YOI had recovered to pre-pandemic levels, and all children felt safe.

Children cannot be educated or rehabilitated while they are locked up alone in their cells. If children are to lead successful, crime-free lives on release, the Youth Custody Service needs to take urgent action to stop the decline in education, skills and work provision.

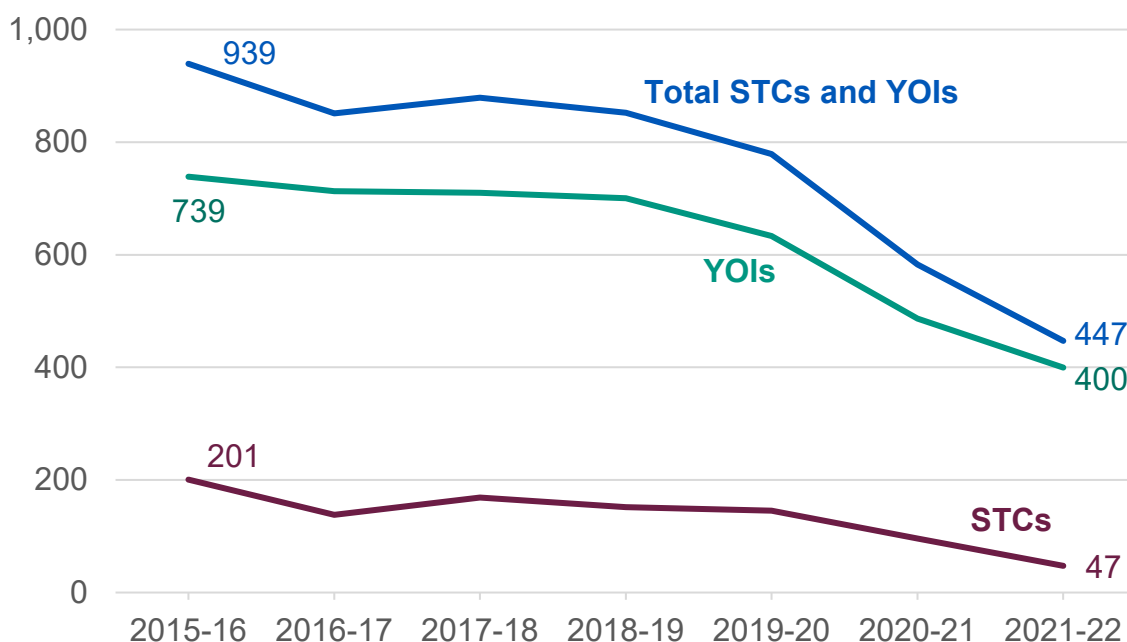
## Introduction

Children in custody are held in one of three settings: secure training centres (STCs), young offender institutions (YOIs) or secure children's homes (SCHs). STCs were originally intended to hold children aged between 12 and 15, but following the introduction of detention and training orders (DTOs) in 2000, the upper age was raised to 18 years. YOIs hold children aged between 15 and 18 years old. SCHs are run by local authorities or other providers and can hold children aged between 10 and 17. As well as those held on youth justice grounds, SCHs can also house those detained for welfare reasons under Section 25 of the Children Act. Girls can be held in SCHs, Wetherby YOI or Oakhill STC.

This report draws from the inspections of, and surveys carried out in six YOIs and two STCs in England and Wales. HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMI Prisons) has no remit to inspect SCHs; the statutory responsibilities for these inspections rests with Ofsted in England, and with the Care Inspectorate Wales and Estyn in Wales. However, many Youth Custody Service (YCS) published statistics quoted in this report include children in SCHs, who make up 14% of the children in custody. It should also be noted that while Rainsbrook STC has now been closed, the inspection and survey responses are still contained within this annual report as children were held in the establishment during the reporting period.

The number of children held in STCs and YOIs has sharply declined over previous years. As a result, the average population of under 18-year-olds held in both types of establishment was just 447 in 2021–22, compared with 939 in 2015–16.

**Figure 1: Average population of STCs and YOIs (including 18-year-olds), years ending March 2016 to March 2022, England and Wales**



Source: monthly Youth Custody Report, YCS

This meant that all sites were operating at well below capacity; at the time of our inspections, the occupancy rate in YOIs was 52% and in STCs it was 43%. This low population had the effect of improving staff to child ratios in all settings.

This report combines evidence from inspections and surveys of children conducted by HMI Prisons in 2021–22, along with published statistics. The report focuses on:

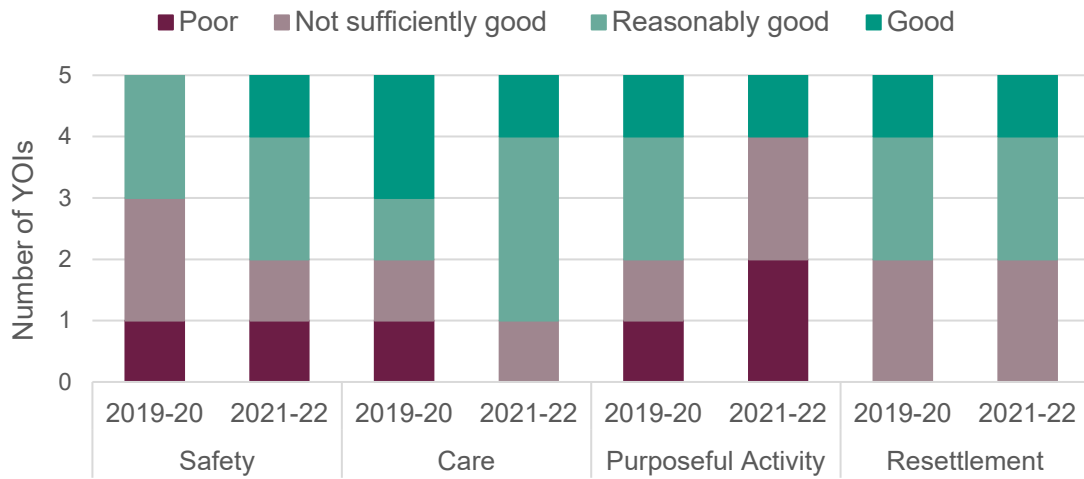
- a) the types of children in custody and how their experiences of custody differ
- b) the impact of the pandemic on children in custody
- c) children’s experiences of purposeful activity in custody.

This is the first time we have surveyed all children held in YOIs and STCs since 2019–20. During 2020–21 we amended our inspection methodology to mitigate COVID-19 risks by carrying out scrutiny visits and short scrutiny visits which did not include a full survey. This report outlines the effect of the pandemic and the response to it on children’s views about their treatment and conditions.

Any differences in survey findings quoted in this report are statistically significant unless stated otherwise. The full findings from our surveys of children in custody are available on our website.

When comparing inspections of YOIs in 2021–22 with their previous inspections, we found that outcomes had improved in safety and care. Outcomes in purposeful activity had declined substantially as children received less time in education than before the pandemic. Resettlement outcomes remained the same.

**Figure 2: Healthy prison outcomes, 2019–20 and 2021–22, YOIs in England and Wales**



Source: HMI Prisons inspection report

## Section 1 Who are the children in custody?

- 1.1 Children in YOIs and STCs differ substantially from children in the general population. They tend to be male, older, more likely to be from a black or minority ethnic background, and more likely to have been in local authority care. A large proportion report that they have health problems and 9% report having children of their own.
- 1.2 Of the children we surveyed in STCs and YOIs in 2021–22:
- Most were aged 15–18. Only 1% of children reported being under 15 years of age.
  - Just 2% were girls.
  - Over half (56%) reported being from a minority ethnic background. This is the highest figure we have recorded since our survey started in 2001.
  - Twenty-four per cent of the children reported being Muslim.
  - Six per cent identified as being from a Traveller community.
  - Fifty-nine per cent reported having been in local authority care.
  - Nine per cent reported having children themselves.
  - Forty-two per cent reported having health problems and 27% said they had a disability.
- 1.3 Youth Custody Service (YCS) statistics for 2021–22 show that the majority (65%) of children in custody were sentenced for a violence against the person offence – a proportion that has been increasing from 33% in 2015–16. Children in custody are now more likely to be there on remand than any other legal basis, with 42% on remand in 2021–22. Children are still placed too far from home, away from their friends and family and the support that they can bring. This has been increasing; children placed 100 or more miles from their home peaked at 15% of all children in custody in 2020–21.
- 1.4 The number of children in custody has been falling over the last decade, in part due to the success of diversion schemes. This has meant fewer children have come into contact with the criminal justice system and those that do are more likely to receive community sentences. The pandemic, and associated reductions in court activity, has accelerated this rate of reduction over the most recent two years.
- 1.5 With this changing population of children in custody comes increased challenges for the establishments that care for them. YCS statistics show that despite seeing some decreases in assaults and self-harm during 2020–21, these increased again in 2021–22.
- The rate of assault incidents involving children in custody increased by 25% compared with the previous year, to 402 assaults per 100 children.

- The rate of self-harm increased by 29% compared with the previous year, to 289 incidents per 100 children. This is a return to the historically high levels seen in the year before the pandemic.

## **Experiences of custody differs for some children**

- 1.6 Only seven girls in custody completed our survey in 2021–22 and therefore figures are not comparable with boys. However:
- Six girls reported having been in local authority care.
  - Five of the six girls who answered this question reported having been physically restrained while in custody.
  - None of the six girls who answered the question reported receiving weekly visits from their family or friends.
  - Three of the six girls who answered these questions reported having felt unsafe and four of the six having experienced victimisation from other children.
- 1.7 Experiences of custody varied for different groups. Our survey showed that in 2021–22:
- Children from an ethnic group other than white were more likely than white children to report being out of their cell for less than two hours at the weekend (64% compared with 46%). This was a similar picture for Muslim children (72%), although there was a large crossover between the groups, with 92% of Muslim children being from an ethnic group other than white.
  - Children from an ethnic group other than white were more likely to report experiencing victimisation from staff (42% compared with 27% for white children) and experience restraint (73% compared with 54% for white children).
  - In this context it was concerning that children from an ethnic group other than white had less faith in the complaints system (32% felt their complaints were dealt with fairly compared with 54% for white children) and were more likely to report having felt too scared to make a complaint (12% compared with 2% for white children).
  - Children with a disability were more likely to report having felt unsafe (37% compared with 23% for children without a disability) and more likely to have experienced verbal victimisation and threats or intimidation from other children.
  - Children who had ever been in local authority care were more likely to report experiencing victimisation from staff and were less likely to have visits from friends or family.
- 1.8 Equality and diversity provision was not prioritised during the pandemic. At every YOI inspection in 2021–22 we identified weaknesses in provision and had key concerns that needed to be addressed. At most sites leaders and managers were not systematically monitoring outcomes to identify discrimination, and where this did take place it rarely led to actions to address or explain the differences in treatment.



'The promotion of equality and diversity remained weak. Equality monitoring data did not lead to actions or thorough investigations into disproportionate outcomes for some children in protected groups. Investigations into discrimination following receipt of incident report forms were poor and some did not take place at all.'

**Cookham Wood, August 2021**

- 1.9 Some groups of children consistently report significantly worse treatment than others. The inadequate systems in all establishments to identify and address discrimination need addressing across the custodial estate.

## Section 2 How has the pandemic impacted children in custody?

### Relationships between staff and children have improved in YOIs

- 2.1 Positive relationships between staff and children underpin outcomes in all areas in children's establishments. Children rely on staff for every aspect of their life, from providing clothes and bedding to keeping them safe. If staff are unable to respond effectively to reasonable day-to-day requests, children are unlikely to trust them to resolve more significant problems they face, such as bullying, self-harm or arranging somewhere to live on release.
- 2.2 The pandemic had a positive impact on children's perceptions of relationships with staff in YOIs. Findings from inspections show that the decline in the population, and the reduction in the size of groups unlocked at the same time, had the effect of increasing the staff to child ratio. This gave staff and children more opportunities to get to know one another and build more effective relationships.

'During the pandemic, staff had worked with children in smaller 'family' groups, which they said had enabled them to get to know the children better. We observed many positive interactions where staff showed a good understanding of the needs of individual children.'

**Wetherby and Keppel, December 2021**

- 2.3 While these improvements are welcome, it is still concerning that 45% of children in YOIs reported that they did not feel cared for by most staff and 25% did not have anyone to turn to if they had a problem.

**Figure 3: Children’s perceptions of their relationship with staff, 2019–20 and 2021–22, YOIs in England and Wales**



Source: HMI Prisons detainee surveys

2.4 These improved relationships were also apparent in questions about children’s first few days in custody, behaviour management and preparation for release. This demonstrates the central importance of relationships between staff and children in improving outcomes in all four of our healthy prison tests.

‘Underpinning Parc’s success were the excellent relationships between young people and the staff who cared for them. The culture was one of engagement, high expectations and incentivisation of good behaviour. Staff modelled high standards of behaviour themselves and were prepared to tackle delinquency among young people when they saw it.’

**Parc, May 2022**

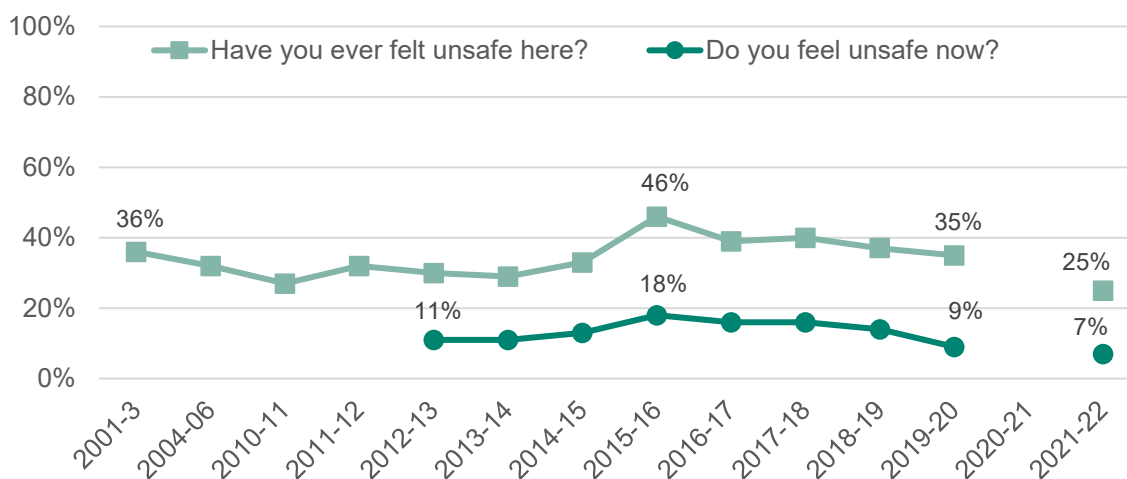
### Perceptions of safety have improved in YOIs

2.5 Positively the number of children who report having ever felt unsafe in YOIs has fallen to 25%; the lowest figure recorded since the question was introduced in 2001. Inspections of YOIs found that outcomes were reasonably good or better in three YOIs (Feltham, Parc and Wetherby) – an improvement from two in 2019–20.

‘Violence had reduced considerably since our last inspection and was now similar to other YOIs.’

**Feltham, February 2022**

**Figure 4: Children’s perceptions of safety, 2001–03 to 2021–22, YOIs in England and Wales**



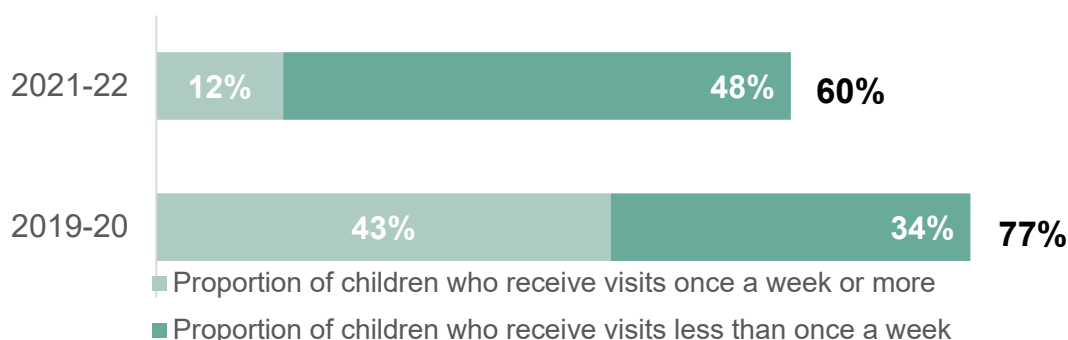
Source: HMI Prisons detainee surveys

- 2.6 In 2015–16 the percentage of children in YOIs who reported that they had felt unsafe peaked at 46%. The percentage of children reporting this is now at its lowest, and represent a fall from pre-pandemic levels.
- 2.7 For children who have ever felt unsafe, responses varied between the YOIs; from 12% of children at Parc – where we judged outcomes in safety to be good – to 38% at Werrington where outcomes were rated poor.

### Fewer children received visits from friends and family

- 2.8 In YOIs the effect of pandemic restrictions has been to limit the opportunities for face-to-face contact with family and friends. Before the pandemic, in 2019–20, 77% of children reported receiving visits from friends and family. This fell to 60% in the latest year.

**Figure 5: Children receiving visits from friends and family and frequency of visits, 2019–20 and 2021–22, YOIs in England and Wales**



Source: HMI Prisons detainee surveys

- 2.9 In STCs the situation was better: 90% of children in STCs reported that they received visits, of whom 27% received them weekly. This difference between YOIs and STCs reflected a swifter lifting of visits restrictions in STCs.
- 2.10 Our findings show that even after restrictions on visits were lifted, provision in YOIs was worse than before the pandemic. Children found it difficult to see their families due to a lack of visits in the evenings or at weekends, or a lack of support to help book a visit.

‘Visits with friends or family had been reduced to just one hour in the evenings Monday to Friday and children could only have a visit on an allocated day according to the unit on which they lived. This limited opportunities for visits and uptake was unsurprisingly low. The absence of visits at weekends put at a disadvantage children whose families worked during the week, travelled long distances or had other childcare responsibilities.’

**Wetherby and Keppel, December 2021**

‘In July 2021, only 36 visits had taken place, out of 150 slots available... children and their families needed more support and encouragement to access the provision.’

**Cookham Wood, August 2021**

- 2.11 Maintaining contact with families and friends, where it is safe to do so, is a key factor in improving outcomes on release and reducing the risk of reoffending. Reinvigorating visits provision should be a priority for the Youth Custody Service.



**Visits area at Feltham**

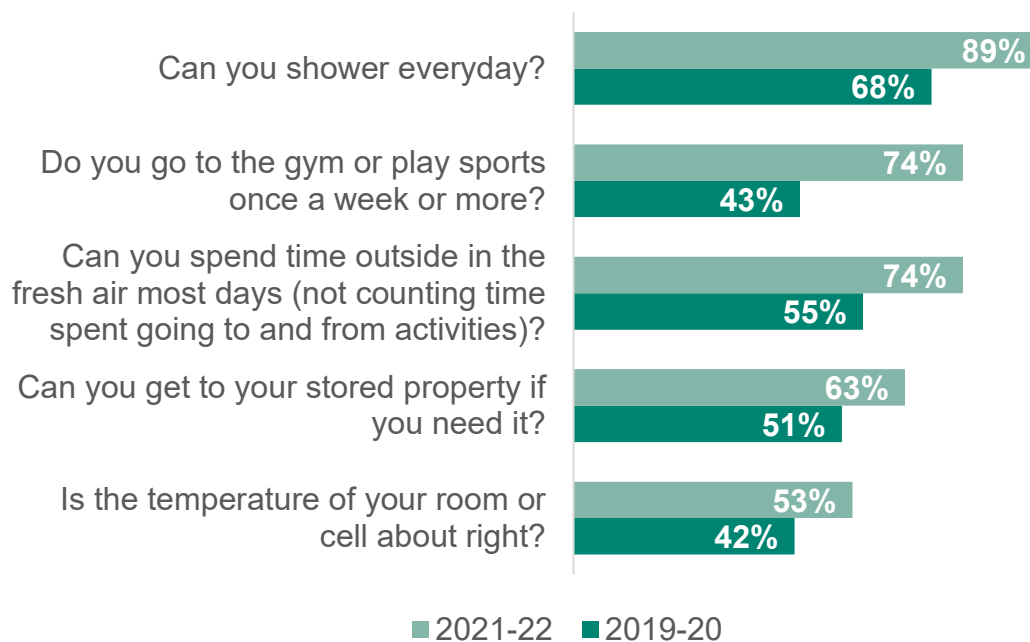
## Section 3 How do children spend their time in custody?

- 3.1 Many children come into custody after living chaotic lives in the community, and a large proportion will have experienced significant trauma. Often children have had negative experiences of education. Custody provides an opportunity for many of these children to receive help from health care professionals and make up for lost time by achieving skills and qualifications to help them become successful adults.
- 3.2 Unfortunately, the pandemic and leaders' response to it had impacted negatively on many aspects of purposeful activity, in particular the quality of education.

### Experiences of living conditions and daily life have improved in YOIs but remained better in STCs

- 3.3 The recent reduction in population across all sites, combined with fewer hours of education delivery and the installation of more in-cell showers during the pandemic, have meant perceptions in some areas of daily life have improved in YOIs.
- 3.4 More children in YOIs reported that they could shower every day, could access their stored property and that the temperature in their cell was about right.

Figure 6: Children's experiences of daily life, 2019–20 and 2021–22, YOIs in England and Wales



Source: HMI Prisons detainee surveys

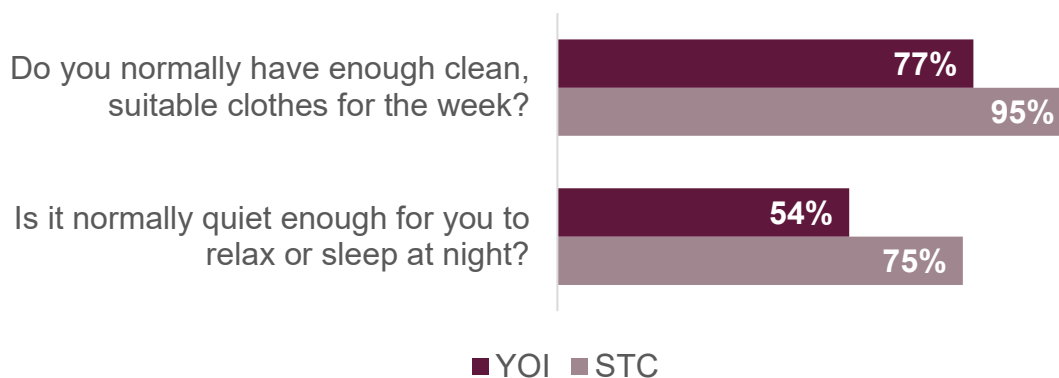
3.5 During 2021–22, pandemic restrictions meant most YOIs delivered around 15 hours of education a week (with the exception of Parc which delivered 25 hours a week), compared with 25–27 hours a week before the pandemic. It was concerning that improvements in access to activities like outside exercise had been made at the expense of time in education.



**Sports field at Cookham Wood**

3.6 While children’s experiences of daily life in STCs did not improve compared with 2019–20, they were more likely than their counterparts in YOIs to report that they normally had enough clean, suitable clothes to wear each week and that their cell was normally quiet enough to relax or sleep at night.

**Figure 7: Children's experience of their daily life, STCs compared with YOIs, 2021–22, England and Wales**



*Source: HMI Prisons detainee surveys*

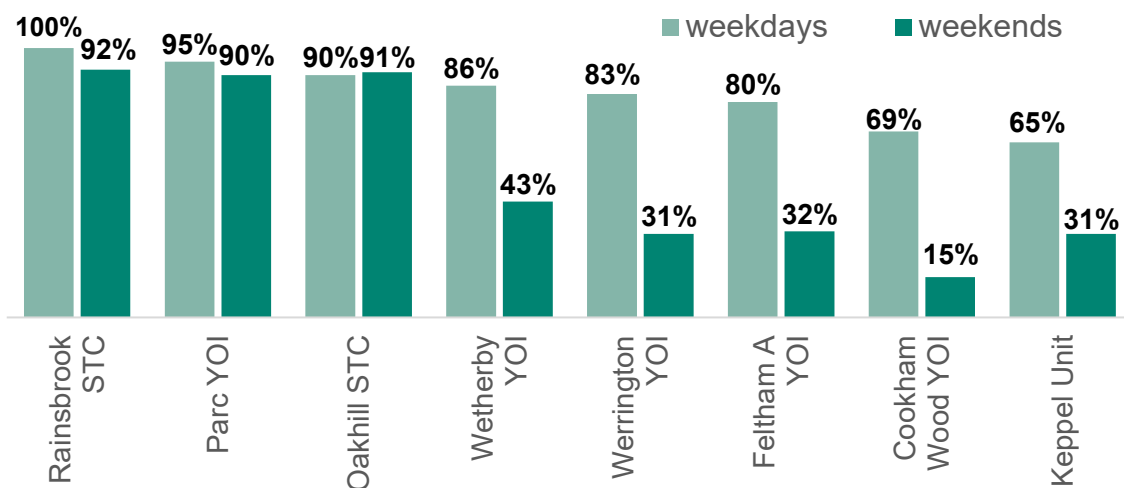


3.7 Children’s views on the quality of the food had improved in YOIs since 2019–20 and were better than the views of children in STCs. However, the food was still unpopular in all settings, with just 39% of children reporting that the quality of food was good or very good. Children’s experience of mealtimes varied dramatically; in the STCs and Parc YOI children could eat their meals around a table with other children and staff, but at the other YOIs most children ate meals alone in their cell.

### Time out of cell was better in STCs and Parc, but still too limited in other YOIs

3.8 Nearly all children in STCs continued to spend more than two hours out of their cell (95% on weekdays and 91% at weekends). This was more than in YOIs, where 80% of children reported receiving more than two hours out of their cell during the week, falling to just 35% at the weekend. While this was no worse than before the pandemic it reflects a long-term failure to provide enough meaningful activity for children in YOIs, particularly at the weekend.

**Figure 8: Children reporting spending more than two hours out of their cell on weekdays and weekends, 2021–22, YOIs and STCs in England and Wales**



Source: HMI Prisons detainee surveys



**Child's cell at Feltham**

- 3.9 In 2021–22, we only judged outcomes in purposeful activity to be good in one YOI: Parc. In all of the four other YOIs (and the Keppel Unit at Wetherby) outcomes in this area were judged to be poor or not sufficiently good. The children's views on time out cell at Parc were much more comparable to children in STCs than children in the other YOIs. This was because leaders and managers at Parc had restarted activities, including education, library provision and PE, far more quickly than elsewhere. Throughout the pandemic these services were also expanded more quickly, and at the time of our inspection (March 2022), Parc was the only YOI to be delivering a pre-pandemic regime for children.

### **Education was not good enough at most sites**

- 3.10 Ninety per cent of children reported receiving education at the time of the inspection and just 7% reported not being engaged in any education, training or work. In 2019–20, in YOIs, the response was 85% and 13% respectively and in STCs the response was 85% and 11%. These figures mask a deterioration in the amount and quality of education children received at all establishments except Parc.
- 3.11 In most YOIs education providers were aiming to deliver around 15 hours of education a week, compared with 27 hours before the pandemic. At Parc managers delivered 25 hours of education each

week which was the same as before the pandemic. In STCs, while children received more hours of education than in YOIs, this was undermined by poor planning of lessons, recruitment difficulties and, at Rainsbrook, weak behaviour management.

- 3.12 Ofsted considered the education provision in all English YOIs and STCs to be inadequate or requires improvement. In contrast, the education inspectorate for Wales, Estyn, rated Parc as excellent across all five of their standards. They noted that at Parc:

Children responded very well to the nurturing, caring ethos of the unit. Nearly all the children knew how to raise concerns with staff and every child that inspectors spoke to felt safe in class.

Nearly all children were encouraged to engage well in education and to contribute fully in class. Many became fully immersed in sessions. One learner observed that 'sometimes when I'm in this lesson, I forget that I'm in prison'.

**Parc, May 2022**

## Appendix I Demographic and background characteristics

Demographic and other background characteristics of children who completed a questionnaire – overall, between types of, and within establishments

		YOIs						Total YOIs	STCs		Total STCs	Total all children
		Cookham Wood	Keppel Unit	Wetherby	Werrington	Feltham	Parc		Oakhill	Rainsbrook		
Gender	Male	100%	100%	97%	100%	100%	100%	99%	100%	78%	91%	98%
	Female	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	22%	9%	2%
Age	14 or under	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%	0%	3%	0%	2%	1%
	15	2%	12%	1%	8%	0%	0%	3%	31%	22%	27%	7%
	16	17%	8%	29%	15%	21%	21%	20%	28%	26%	27%	21%
	17	67%	38%	58%	62%	61%	63%	60%	31%	43%	36%	56%
	18 or over	15%	42%	11%	15%	18%	11%	17%	6%	9%	7%	15%

<b>Ethnicity</b>	White	26%	77%	68%	33%	23%	42%	43%	42%	52%	46%	44%
	Mixed	18%	12%	14%	29%	18%	16%	18%	12%	9%	11%	17%
	Asian	8%	0%	4%	10%	7%	0%	6%	0%	4%	2%	5%
	Black	47%	4%	14%	29%	45%	37%	30%	39%	35%	38%	31%
	Arab	0%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%	0%	4%	1%
	Other	2%	4%	0%	0%	7%	5%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Traveller</b>	Yes	8%	19%	4%	8%	0%	5%	6%	9%	4%	7%	6%
	No	92%	81%	96%	92%	100%	95%	94%	91%	96%	93%	94%
<b>Religion</b>	No Religion	13%	60%	38%	14%	19%	50%	28%	21%	40%	29%	28%
	Christian	48%	36%	50%	43%	43%	33%	45%	54%	40%	48%	45%
	Buddhist	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Jewish	0%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Muslim	37%	0%	12%	37%	37%	11%	25%	18%	15%	17%	24%
	Other	2%	0%	0%	6%	2%	0%	2%	7%	5%	6%	2%

<b>Health problems</b>	Yes	34%	65%	41%	37%	43%	56%	42%	43%	43%	43%	42%
	No	66%	35%	59%	63%	57%	44%	58%	57%	57%	57%	58%
<b>Disability</b>	Yes	21%	65%	21%	21%	25%	16%	26%	39%	32%	36%	27%
	No	79%	35%	79%	79%	75%	84%	75%	61%	68%	64%	73%
<b>Been cared for in local authority</b>	Yes	62%	76%	64%	66%	53%	47%	62%	39%	54%	46%	59%
	No	38%	24%	36%	34%	47%	53%	38%	61%	46%	54%	41%
<b>Have children</b>	Yes	17%	12%	9%	2%	2%	16%	9%	7%	13%	9%	9%
	No	83%	88%	91%	98%	98%	84%	91%	93%	87%	91%	91%

## Appendix II Methodology

### Administering the survey

At the time of the survey, researchers from HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMI Prisons) attempted to invite all children in every secure training centre (STC) and young offender institution (YOI) to complete a questionnaire. In some instances, for example when a child was at court or an outside hospital, it was not possible to speak to all children. In total, 93% of children detained in YOIs and STCs at the time of our survey were offered the opportunity to complete a questionnaire. Every effort was made to speak to each child individually to explain the purpose and confidentiality of the survey, its voluntary nature and the independence of the inspection process. We also offered to administer the questionnaire via an interview for children who said they needed assistance.

We asked children not to put their name on their questionnaire, but to enable us to follow up any child protection and safeguarding issues, each questionnaire was numbered so that any relevant comments could be traced back to the respondent. Children were made aware of this. Self-completed questionnaires were placed in sealed envelopes and collected by HMI Prisons researchers.

### Response rate

In the 2021–22 reporting year, as shown in Table 1, questionnaires were completed (either through self-completion or via an interview) and returned by 83% of the children in the available sample (representing 77% of the children who were resident in the establishment at the time of the survey). The response rate ranged from 73% at Wetherby to 96% at Keppel unit.

**Table 1: Sample sizes and response rates across STCs and YOIs during 2019–20**

The response rate for YOIs and STCs has been calculated as a proportion of the total number of children who were offered a questionnaire.

YOIs	Date of survey	Population on survey date	Number of questionnaires distributed	Number of returned questionnaires	Response rate
Cookham Wood	2 Aug 2021	87	82	62	76%
Wetherby	6 Dec 2021	115	108	79	73%
Keppel unit	6 Dec 2021	27	27	26	96%
Werrington	24 Jan 2022	64	62	53	85%
Feltham A	21 Feb 2022	75	61	56	92%
Parc	28 Mar 2022	20	20	19	95%
<b>YOI Total</b>		388	360	295	82%

STCs	Date of survey	Population on survey date	Number of questionnaires distributed	Number of returned questionnaires	Response rate
Rainsbrook	26 May 2021	30	28	24	86%
Oakhill	28 Sept 2021	40	38	33	87%
<b>STC total</b>		70	66	57	87%
<b>YOI AND STC TOTAL</b>		458	426	352	83%

## Non-responses

Missing data, where respondents did not answer a question, have been excluded from the analysis. This means that the percentages calculated are from a total sum where there may have been different response rates to each question within the survey.

Figures quoted in this report have been rounded to the nearest whole number. In some cases, due to the way we round the data, a result of 0% can, in fact, have been reported and/or experienced by a very small number of children. For example, across the entire YOI sample of 295 individuals, the response of one child on a given issue would appear as 0% in our report.

## Analyses conducted

In addition to presenting the aggregated survey responses for children in custody (across all STCs and YOIs), additional analyses are reported:

- a comparison between survey responses received from children in STCs and YOIs
- responses from children in each STC and YOI, as well as the overall response from children in that type of custody setting
- statistical comparisons between different subgroups within the 2021–22 responses, where numbers allowed. Highlighting is used in tables to show where there are statistically significant differences.



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