



A joint inspection of education, training and employment services in youth offending teams in England and Wales

An inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation, Estyn and Ofsted

June 2022

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Contents

Foreword	4
Contextual facts	5
Executive summary	6
Recommendations	12
1. Introduction	13
1.1. Why this thematic?	13
1.2. Background.....	14
1.3. Aims and objectives.....	15
1.4. Report outline	17
Governance and leadership	17
Staff	17
Partnerships and services	17
Data and information	17
2. Organisational delivery	18
2.1. Governance and leadership	18
2.2. Staff.....	20
2.3. Partnerships and services.....	22
2.4. Information and facilities.....	26
2.5. Innovation	28
3. Case management	30
3.1. Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Delivery, Review (ASPIRE).....	30
3.2. Further findings.....	33
3.3. Out-of-court disposal cases	33
3.4. School-aged children.....	35
3.5. EHCP/IDP	35
3.6. Children with disabilities.....	36
3.7. The Children’s views about working with the YOT.....	37
4. Covid-19 pandemic	39
4.1. ETE delivery during the pandemic.....	39
5. Outcomes	41
References	44
Annexe 1: Methodology	45
Annexe 2: Expert Reference Group	46
Annexe 3: HM Inspectorate of Probation National YOT survey - 2021	47
Annexe 4: Case management data with splits	51

Foreword

Access to education, training and employment (ETE) opportunities is fundamental to the future prospects of children on youth offending service caseloads and to their desistance from further offending, but this thematic and our recent local inspections show gaps in provision and major barriers to participation for some children.

Almost two-thirds of the children in our case sample were, or had been, excluded from school (65 per cent) and, of those, just under half (47 per cent) had been permanently excluded. Where children were receiving schooling, far too often they were on long-term part-time timetables and some children were receiving no schooling at all. It was not unusual for our inspectors to see cases where a child had not been engaged in ETE for two years or more.

Although across our inspection sample as a whole the quality of assessment, planning and delivery in relation to ETE was generally sufficient, we found that the quality of educational support was worse for children who had been excluded from school or released under investigation by the police, and for children of mixed ethnic heritage. Most disturbingly, it was worst of all for children with education and health care plans (England) and Individual Development Plans (Wales), whose needs are likely to be greatest. In over 40 per cent of cases with these additional plans the needs of the child were not fully considered, and provision was insufficient in nearly half of cases.

Over the course of the inspection, we reviewed comprehensive evidence in advance for each of the youth offending teams and reviewed 181 cases (120 court disposals and 61 out-of-court disposals). As part of our inspection process, we gathered information about the many cases and interventions which met or exceeded our expectations. These are included in the accompanying effective practice guide.

We found that when the youth offending team (YOT) partnership functioned well, there were close and active working relationships between the management board and local authority, health, police and probation colleagues. We saw, however, that when the flow of information between YOTs and education providers was inconsistent, this had a direct effect on the quality of ETE services being provided to individual children.

YOT caseloads are changing, with increases in the proportion of children that YOTs are working with who are on an out-of-court disposal. Although the length of engagement with these cases is much shorter (typically less than 12 weeks) than for post-court work, these children's lives can be complex, and it is important that YOT management boards plan for high-quality and effective working arrangements in these cases. YOTs should have high aspirations for the ETE work, in which all the children are engaged, and it is with this in mind that we have made a number of recommendations in the report.



Justin Russell

HM Chief Inspector of Probation
June 2022

Contextual facts

National statistics:

1.5% (124,000)¹	Pupils severely absent (missing over 50% of sessions) from school in the autumn 2021 term – England.
6.5%²	16- to 18-year-olds not in education, employment or training at the end of 2020 – England.
11%³	16- to 18-year-olds not in education, employment or training in 2020 – Wales.
0.6 per 1,000 pupils⁴	Permanent exclusion from school rate within the 2019/2020 academic year – England.
0.5 per 1,000 pupils⁵	Permanent exclusion from school rate within the 2019/2020 academic year – Wales.
34%⁶	Permanent exclusions in 2019/2020 due to the most common reason, 'persistent disruptive behaviour' – England.
20%⁷	Permanent exclusions in 2019/2020 due to the most common reason, 'physical assault against a pupil' – Wales.

In HM Inspectorate of Probation national YOT survey (2021)⁸ – England and Wales:

16%	of YOTs reported that over 20% of children of school age on the caseload were not in school/pupil referral unit/alternative provision.
63%	of YOTs reported that over 20% of children over school age on the caseload were not in education, employment or training.
54%	of YOTs reported that over 20% of children on the caseload had an education, health and care plan or Individual Development Plan.
65%	of YOTs reported that over 20% of children on the caseload had special educational needs or additional learning needs.

Of the cases we inspected:

30%	of our selected case sample had been permanently excluded from school – England and Wales.
39%	of our selected case sample who were over school age were not in education, training or employment.

¹ Children's Commissioner. (March 2022). *Where Are England's Children?*

² Department for Education. (2021). *Participation in Education and Training and Employment. Calendar Year 2020*. Available at <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/participation-in-education-and-training-and-employment#dataBlock-f1dd17d8-28ab-4e16-9c34-cd086a5ba456-tables>.

³ Welsh Government. (2021). *Participation of Young People in Education and the Labour Market*. Available at <https://gov.wales/participation-young-people-education-and-labour-market>.

⁴ Department for Education. (2021). *Statistics: Exclusions*. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-exclusions>.

⁵ Welsh Government. (2021). *Permanent and Fixed-term Exclusions from Schools*. Available at <https://gov.wales/permanent-and-fixed-term-exclusions-schools>.

⁶ Department for Education. (2021). *Statistics: Exclusions*. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-exclusions>.

⁷ Welsh Government. (2021). *Permanent and Fixed-term Exclusions from Schools*. Available at <https://gov.wales/permanent-and-fixed-term-exclusions-schools>.

⁸ Figures based on 104 responses received from 154 YOTs in England and Wales (68 per cent response rate). See Annex 2 for all results.

Executive summary

Inspection methodology

During the course of this inspection, in December 2021 and January 2022, we examined the quality of work delivered by youth offending teams (YOTs) in Conwy and Denbighshire, Camden, Doncaster, Leicester City, Bristol and Salford. Due to the circumstances of restrictions associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, we undertook five remote inspections and one face-to-face inspection.

We examined 180 cases of children working with these YOTs, consisting of 119 post-court cases and 61 out-of-court disposal cases. We also conducted 54 meetings with staff, partners and stakeholders. Our colleagues from Estyn and Ofsted conducted further interviews with education providers, including schools, colleges, alternative provision (AP) and pupil referral units (PRUs), and with partnership staff.

We commissioned the services of User Voice, which met 29 children to gather their views of the education, training and employment (ETE) services they had received while they worked with the YOT. Key findings and observations are included in this report.

In order to benchmark and provide background information, we surveyed all YOTs across England and Wales. We achieved a 68 per cent response rate and asked for information about the following:

1. Percentage of children on the current caseload with an education, health and care plan (EHCP; in England) or Individual Development Plan (IDP; in Wales).
2. Percentage of school-aged children on the current caseload who have special educational needs (SEN; in England) or additional learning needs (ALN; in Wales).
3. Percentage of school-aged children on the current caseload of those attending a PRU or receiving AP.
4. Percentage of school-aged children not in any school/PRU/AP.
5. Percentage of children over school leaving age not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Throughout the fieldwork, we identified and gathered examples of effective practice work at both organisational and case levels.

Findings overview

Strengths

- YOT boards consistently prioritised ETE work in the delivery of services
- Operational staff had enough time to deliver high quality work with children
- Staff had good access to training in recognising children's needs in relation to ETE
- YOTs delivering good ETE work had well-developed partnership arrangements, including specialist assessment and interventions.

Areas for improvement

- The quality of ETE work was poorest for those children who most needed it, and this was particularly evident when a child had an EHCP (in England) or IDP (in Wales)
- We found too many cases where children were not making progress and whose vulnerability was increasing because of low levels of engagement in positive work
- Boards were not monitoring key aspects of the children's engagement in ETE.

- Access to ETE opportunities is key to the future prospects of children on YOT caseloads but this thematic inspection has found significant barriers to participation. Although we did find examples of effective practice in all the YOTs we visited, it is disappointing, that we found the quality of work was poorest for those children who most needed it. The support provided to the child to engage in ETE should be clear and reviewed regularly.

The challenges

Access to ETE opportunities is fundamental to the future prospects of children on YOT caseloads and to their desistance from further offending, but this thematic and our recent local inspections show gaps in provision and major barriers to participation. Our national YOS survey shows that one in six of the YOTs reported that over 20 per cent of their caseload were not in mainstream school. Even when these children are in school, far too many of them have only part-time timetables. Almost 40 per cent of the children in our case sample of 180 had been permanently excluded from school, and almost two-fifths of those over statutory school age were NEET.

We found significant barriers to full participation – 68 of the 104 YOTs responding to our survey said that over 20 per cent of children on their caseload had SEN or ALN. 56 of these 104 YOTs told us that over 20 per cent of their caseload had an EHCP or ILP. In our case sample, 36 per cent of the children had a disability or neurodivergent condition. Worryingly, our case inspections showed that this group had the worst-quality support of any cohort we looked at, with delivery of services insufficient in over one-third of the cases we inspected.

Governance and leadership

On YOT caseloads in England and Wales, there is a disproportionate level of:

- EHCPs/IDPs,
- SEN in England or ALN in Wales,
- children attending PRUs or AP,
- children not in school,
- children over school leaving age who are NEET.

As shown in Table 1, the results from a survey sent to all YOTs in England and Wales (68 per cent response rate) illustrate the extent of this disproportionate representation when compared with children in the general population.⁹ Detailed findings from the survey can be found in Annexe 2.

⁹ While these figures give a good indication of the extent of disproportionate representation, there is some variance between the general population figures and those provided in the YOT survey. These are highlighted in the footnotes.

Table 1: Disproportionate incidence of key factors influencing educational engagement and attainment in England and Wales

Key education factor	General child population (%)	YOT caseload ¹⁰	Extent of disproportionate representation where YOTs report this factor for over 20% of children on caseload
EHCP/IDP	3.7% – England only ¹¹	More than half of YOTs reported that over 20% of children had an EHCP (or ILP)	YOT rates at least five times that of the general child population
SEN/ALN	12.2% – England only ¹²	Two-thirds of YOTs reported that over 20% of children had SEN or ALN	YOT rates almost twice as high as the general child population ¹³
PRU/AP attendance	0.5% – England only ¹⁴	Almost half of YOTs reported that over 20% of children attended a PRU or AP	YOT rates over 40 times higher than the general child population
Children not in school/PRU/AP – England only	0.3% not in school ¹⁵	One in six of YOTs had over 20% of the children on the caseload not in school/PRU/AP	YOT rates over 60 times more than that of the general child population
Children who are over school leaving age who are NEET	6.5% – England ¹⁶ 11.1% – Wales ¹⁷	Almost two-thirds of YOTs had over 20% of children over school age who were NEET	YOT rates between almost two (Wales) and over three (England) times that of the general child population

¹⁰ Figures from survey to all YOTs in England and Wales. See Annexe 2.

¹¹ Figure relates to EHCP only and includes state-funded nursery, primary, secondary and special schools, non-maintained special schools, PRUs and independent schools. From: Department for education. (2021). *Special Educational Needs in England. Academic Year 2020/21*. Available at <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england>.

¹² Figures relate to children receiving SEN support only and include state-funded nursery, primary, secondary and special schools, non-maintained special schools, PRU and independent schools. From: Department for education. (2021). *Special Educational Needs in England. Academic Year 2020/21*. Available at <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england>.

¹³ Consideration does need to be given to the fact that, as a result of the extent of assessment undertaken, children who come into contact with YOTs are potentially more likely to have SEN needs identified than children in the general population.

¹⁴ Department for education. (2021). *Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics. Academic Year 2020/21*. Available at <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>.

¹⁵ This is the missing from the education figure for those aged 11–15 years. See: Children’s Commissioner. (March 2022). *Where Are England’s Children?*

¹⁶ Figure relates to 16–18-year-olds. From: Department for Education. (2021). *Participation in Education and Training and Employment. Calendar Year 2020*. Available at <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/participation-in-education-and-training-and-employment#dataBlock-f1dd17d8-28ab-4e16-9c34-cd086a5ba456-tables>.

¹⁷ Figures related to 16-18-year-olds. From: Welsh Government. (2022). *Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET): October 2020 to September 2021*. Available at <https://gov.wales/young-people-not-education-employment-or-training-neet-october-2020-september-2021>.

We found that YOT management boards had a good understanding of this disproportionality. Boards prioritised ETE work consistently and there was conviction that child-first and trauma-informed approaches to work with children who offend would support engagement in ETE processes effectively.

Not all board chairs saw themselves as able to influence or direct the work of the YOT positively, and the strength of partnership representation on boards varied. Where partners were strongly represented, particularly in relation to education and health, there was evidence of YOT children being integrated into the wider local authority and health services. This yielded well-resourced, specialist provision in those YOTs and, consequently, more was known about the range of ETE needs with which the children were presenting, meaning that appropriate support could be provided.

Staff

Without exception, staff working in YOTs had manageable caseloads, giving them the time to develop positive working relationships with the children with whom they worked. We found that YOT staff were highly motivated and tenacious, and this was the case both for case managers and partnership staff. Some staff experienced frustration, however, at the lack of support for children with complex lives in either an educational or training setting. In the majority of locations, where specialist ETE staff were in post, there was an over-reliance on the specialist role. As a result of limited contingency planning for staff absence, or interruptions caused by staff turnover, case managers were not as effective as education specialists in securing access to the right information or engaging with education providers at times of difficulty for the child.

Staff had good access to training, and this included neurodivergent conditions, understanding childhood trauma and forming productive working relationships with children.

Management oversight of ETE work was, in the main, supportive of the delivery of high-quality services. We were concerned that processes for escalation were not always in place, or used well enough, to make sure that the needs of children were fully understood and that support for children in education was provided to encourage the child's engagement. It was worrying to note that, in a number of cases, the EHCP/IDP reviews were not being undertaken at the statutorily required (annual) frequency.

Partnerships and services

Enhanced and effective assessment and planning work with children was provided by specialist education or health services in most YOTs. Specialists also provided support and guidance to YOT case management staff in working with children who had neurological conditions or communication needs.

Those YOTs that delivered high-quality ETE work were characterised by a broad range of support and access to a range of facilities to support ETE delivery. There was a consistent and productive enthusiasm for innovation.

We were concerned that ill-defined processes and limited information-sharing with mainstream schools and colleges meant that there were avoidable barriers to children's engagement and achievement. For example, we identified long-term use of part-time timetables and the very low levels of attendance expected of children in too many cases.

Information and facilities

The national measure to enable boards to monitor ETE is the Youth Justice Board (YJB) measure of children who are NEET. The measure provides a quarterly snapshot of the ETE status of children working with the YOT at the end of the period of supervision following a court disposal. It does not address the status of children working with the YOT as part of an out-of-court disposal. In our sample of children, 34 per cent of cases were for out-of-court disposals. This reflects the national change in the make-up of a YOT caseload.

Critically, and in addition to excluding out-of-court disposals, the information monitored by boards does not address:

- school exclusion rates of children working with the YOT
- part-time timetables, their review and the actual number of hours of attendance being achieved
- the lack of a clear process of review for children with an EHCP/ILP, whether the child was of school age or older
- attendance levels at college or training provision.

Case management

We looked at the quality of assessment, planning, delivery and review of services associated with ETE in individual cases. We considered the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the ETE progress of children working with YOTs and identified outcomes that were attributable to the work that the YOT had delivered. Our understanding of what was happening with individual children was enhanced by the knowledge and expertise of inspectors from Estyn and Ofsted.

Across the 181 individual cases that we inspected we found the quality of assessment was mostly to a good standard; planning was inconsistent; delivery was of variable quality and reviews were not always done well enough. There were deficits in practice in the following aspects of the children's lives:

EHCP/IDP

Children with EHCPs/ILPs were the least well-managed group in our sample. Often, the defined needs of the child were missed in assessment, and this then meant that fewer had good plans, that they received unacceptable levels of service and that these were poorly reviewed. The delivery of services was insufficient in 46 per cent of these cases, and the quality of that service was deemed insufficient in 48 per cent of cases.

Differences in the quality of work which are associated with ethnicity

There were differences in the quality of work between children identified as of mixed ethnic heritage and the others. In assessment work, there was a poorer focus on how to support their desistance from further offending through the offer of ETE, and this was also the case with planning. Consequently, ETE provision was less likely to meet the child's needs.

There were no discernible differences between the quality of work being delivered to black African/Caribbean/black British children and the others.

For the small sub-group identified as Asian/Asian British, the work was of better quality across all aspects of case management.

Out-of-court disposal cases

We found examples of exceptional work being undertaken with children subject to out-of-court disposals. When the work was done well, we found comprehensive assessments based on the appropriate identification and use of information about the child's educational history. However, the planning and reviewing of ETE needs for this cohort were too frequently of a poor standard. The children had multiple and complex needs, and YOTs should ensure that planning and reviewing are of a high quality, in order to meet these needs.

School-aged children

Although assessment work was mostly sufficient, the extent of children's involvement in planning for ETE was insufficient in too many cases. Involvement of a child in their own planning is an important factor and was worryingly low in too many cases.

Children who had been excluded from school

In our case sample, 65 per cent of the children had been excluded from school at some point. In our inspection, we found cases where children seemed to have disappeared from the education system, such as those who were taken off roll in the further education system, or those who were registered at a school or college but who never attended.

Where school exclusion had occurred, assessment work was not consistently good enough; yet, it is with exactly these children that high-quality ETE work is especially critical.

Children with disabilities

The delivery of services for children with identified disabilities too often (in 35 per cent of cases) failed to provide the necessary support needed to sustain the child in education. The most prevalent disabilities identified in the sample were learning or other cognitive disabilities. We estimated that in half of the cases where a disability was identified, this would have a marked effect on the child's functioning.

Children who had been released under investigation by the police¹⁸

A relatively small number of children had been released under investigation. This was clearly associated with higher levels of disengagement in ETE. This is a useful indicator of the need to undertake a more motivational approach with the child.

The effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on ETE services

All YOTs had sought to support children's engagement in ETE during the restrictions associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. When schools and colleges were accessible, extensive support was provided to maintain children's ETE. Appropriate support was provided to children through access to digital equipment where this was necessary.

Outcomes

A significant challenge for the YOT partnership is that by the time a child becomes involved in the criminal justice system, there is a high likelihood that their school experience is entrenched and negative. Many of the children were excluded or had been disengaged from ETE for a long time. In one case, a child had not been at school for five years, and it was not unusual to see children who had not been engaged in ETE for two years or more.

Despite this, in all of the YOTs inspected, we were able to identify tangible ETE outcomes or progression towards outcomes which were attributable to the work being delivered. The improvements were mainly in better engagement with ETE or the development of improved social skills. These improvements need to be the basis for further progress, rather than an end in themselves.

Given that level 2 in English and mathematics is the standard for entry into the workplace, it is noteworthy we found little improvement in literacy and numeracy levels. Achievement at this level should be the aim for most, if not all, of the children working YOTs, with pathways for children set out to this effect.

¹⁸ Release under investigation is used by the police instead of bail – but, unlike pre-charge bail, it has no time limits or conditions. This can leave the accused and alleged victims in limbo, with no updates on their case for an unlimited time. See: The Law Society. (2021). *Release Under Investigation and Pre-charge Bail*. Available at <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/en/campaigns/criminal-justice/release-under-investigation>.

Recommendations

Department for Education/ Welsh Government Skills Higher Education and Lifelong Learning (SHELL) and Education directorates in conjunction with the Ministry of Justice Youth Justice Policy Unit should:

1. address how the unidentified and unmet needs of YOT children can be prevented by earlier specialist assessment, intervention and support of vulnerable children (through the Alternative Provision and SAFE schools' programmes in England and equivalent provision in Wales).

The Youth Justice Board should:

2. revise their national indicator of ETE engagement to one that provides a more meaningful measure of performance. This should include the levels of educational attainment achieved by children working with the YOT at the end of the period of supervision and should cover out of court as well as court order cases.

YOT Management Boards should:

3. ensure that all children have a comprehensive ETE assessment
4. monitor, alongside the local authority, key aspects of ETE work for children working with the YOT, including:
 - the extent of school exclusion in the YOT cohort;
 - the actual level of attendance at school, college, work or training placement;
 - the extent of additional support provided to children with SEN/ ALN;
 - that every child with an ECHP or IDP has this reviewed on an annual basis to meet the statutory requirement.
5. develop ambitious aims for ETE work in the YOT, including the achievement of Level 2 English and Maths by every child
6. establish a greater range of occupational training opportunities for those children beyond compulsory school age
7. monitor and evaluate the levels of educational engagement and attainment in disproportionately represented groups within the YOT caseload in order to develop improvement, including for:
 - children with an EHCP/ ILP;
 - children with SEN/ ALN;
 - children permanently excluded from school;
 - out of court disposal cases;
 - children released under investigation.

1. Introduction

1.1. Why this thematic?

In the HM Inspectorate of Probation annual report of youth offending services (YOSs) (2020), we identified that children known to youth offending teams (YOTs), of both school age and post-school age, encounter challenges in accessing education, training and employment (ETE). This was a problem for nearly two-thirds of the children sentenced to court orders in the cases we inspected. Although the situation was better for those subject to out-of-court disposals, access to education was still a problem for 47 per cent of children.

School-aged children

Levels of school exclusions for children on YOT caseloads were high and there was an over-reliance on the use of pupil referral units (PRUs) in some YOTs. YOT management boards were not always aware of exclusion 'hotspots' or had not developed strategies to address this issue. We found that some pupils placed in alternative education were unable to take GCSEs and there was not always enough suitable provision for children with complex needs.

We were concerned to find that children were not always receiving their legal entitlement¹⁹ to education and this was not being addressed strategically. In five of the 16 inspected areas considered in our annual report, we found that local authorities needed to improve education provision to children.

Significant numbers of children on YOT caseloads had education, health and care plans (EHCPs) in England, or Individual Development Plans (IDPs) in Wales, but their identified needs were not always reflected in YOT assessments and casework. Too often, the EHCP had not been obtained because of poor processes between the YOT and education departments.

Over-16s

In most YOTs, information, advice and guidance are available to young people over the age of 16, to help them find suitable ETE. However, the impact of this support was sometimes limited. In one area, the proportion of YOT children over the statutory school age who were not in ETE was 37 per cent, compared with two per cent in the general population.²⁰ This sort of disparity was not uncommon and needs to be fully understood and addressed, particularly given the significance of education in supporting desistance.

In this inspection, we aimed to test the following ideas and hypotheses:

- Where ETE provision is supportive and responsive to the needs of the child, there will be positive consequences for the likely desistance of the individual. When this is not the case, we would expect to see a heightened risk of reoffending and heightened vulnerability.
- Children supervised by YOTs are encountering challenges in accessing ETE.
- There are high levels of children supervised by YOTs who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

¹⁹ In England and Wales, full-time education is compulsory for all children between the ages of five and 16. All children in England are expected to continue in education or training until at least their 18th birthday, although in practice the vast majority of young people continue until the end of the academic year in which they turn 18. Those who are 16–17 years of age are required to remain in education and training in England, following Raising Participation Age legislation in 2013. In Wales, children may leave full-time education in the summer of the year in which they attain their 16th birthday.

²⁰ This figure is drawn from HM Inspectorate of Probation (2020). Annual Report: Inspection of Youth Offending Services.

- Although problematic for both groups, those children on court orders will face greater difficulties in accessing education than those subject to out-of-court disposals.
- The Covid-19 pandemic will have increased challenges in children accessing ETE.
- Those YOTs providing good ETE support will have forged strong partnerships with key stakeholders.
- There will be examples of good practice across the YOTs in relation to ETE.
- High levels of school exclusion will be seen on YOT caseloads.
- Some children are not receiving their legal entitlement to education.
- There is not always suitable provision for children with complex needs.
- Information, advice and guidance is available in most YOTs for young people over the age of 16, to help them find suitable ETE opportunities.
- A large number of those over 16 will not be in ETE when compared with the general over-16 population.

1.2. Background

Children supervised by YOTs

Children being supervised by YOTs are more likely to have, or have experienced, problems with attendance, educational engagement and attainment. Problems with schooling can have a lasting negative impact on their chances of work, further education, training or employment, thus affecting an individual's life chances.

Common characteristics of many of the children supervised by YOTs include low levels of numeracy and literacy; speech, language and communication needs; or cognitive disabilities, all of which exacerbate ETE needs. Children in conflict with the law are also more likely to have suffered trauma and adverse childhood experiences which have an impact on their ability to engage with ETE. Such children are more likely to live in deprived neighbourhoods where crime and disorder are prevalent, and good ETE opportunities are fewer.

Tackling the impact of these complex issues on ETE is a tall order for YOTs. Strategic partnerships with statutory agencies, the business community, education providers and the voluntary sector are vital to success. Adding considerably to the huge ETE task for YOTs, the Covid-19 pandemic shut down the sectors, such as hospitality and retail, which employ many young people (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2020). The economic prospects for precariously employed young people with low qualifications, which so often characterises those supervised by YOTs, are concerning.

In addition, although the pandemic disrupted education for all children, those from poorer households have fared worse, as a result of digital exclusion and having less engaged parents. This will have potentially long-term negative impacts on their wellbeing and life chances (Department for Education, 2021).

The Taylor review

The Taylor review of the youth justice system, in 2016, concluded that the causes of youth offending were beyond the ability of traditional criminal justice mechanisms to solve (Taylor, 2016). Breaking rules and making mistakes are part of a normal childhood, so Taylor welcomed the dramatic falls seen in convictions and cautions. The review stated that the route to a better life for children who offend lay in education and training; that closer relationships were needed between schools, colleges and YOSs; and that youth custody needed to be transformed into secure schools.

However, the review found that education representatives in YOT management boards are often peripheral to the operation of YOTs. More successful YOTs have forged strong partnerships with an array of ETE providers, providing constructive activities that prevent offending and lead to better lives for children. Taylor welcomed the Department for Education decision to ensure that schools

retain oversight of excluded pupils, and praised some alternative provision (AP) for engaging well with YOTs and schools.

Taylor called for much shorter criminal records retention for childhood offences, and shorter time for convictions and cautions to become 'spent' and non-disclosable in Disclosure and Barring Service checks.

He concluded by recommending that YOTs be disestablished and subsumed into local authorities, and the YJB be replaced by a directorate of the Ministry of Justice. The government response to the Taylor review welcomed the focus on education and training but did not adopt his structural recommendations.

Current policy context

Since the formation of YOTs, education has been part of the statutory YOT partnership. Relevant aims and expectations are outlined in the *Crime and Disorder Act 1998*:

Section 37 - Aim of the youth justice system

- (1) It shall be the principal aim of the youth justice system to prevent offending by children and young persons.
- (2) In addition to any other duty to which they are subject, it shall be the duty of all persons and bodies carrying out functions in relation to the youth justice system to have regard to that aim.

Section 39 (5) - Youth offending teams

A youth offending team shall include at least one of each of the following, namely:

- where the local authority is in England, a person with experience in education nominated by the director of children's services appointed by the local authority under section 18 of the *Children Act 2004*
- where the local authority is in Wales, a person nominated by the chief education officer appointed by the local authority under section 532 of the *Education Act 1996*.

The Ministry of Justice (2014) emphasised ETE in the resettlement context in its aims for young offender institutions and YOTs:

'Preparing a young person to continue in education, training or employment in advance of a child's release from custody, it is vital that a place in education, training or employment is secured and begins on their first day back in the community ... We will also work closely with YOTs to form the partnerships with education providers, local authorities and employers in the community to facilitate appropriate post-release placements and support. This latter role is especially important in relation to children with an EHC Plan'.

'The YJB promotes a constructive, strengths-led, child-first approach in its standards for children in the youth justice system, which were first published in 2019. Promoting ETE opportunities to children supervised by YOTs is consistent with this child-first approach.

1.3. Aims and objectives

For the purpose of this inspection, we identified that children meeting the criteria outlined below would be included in our sampling for case inspection.

Table 2: Scope of the inspection

	In scope	Out of scope
16- to 18-year-olds	Yes	
Secondary school-aged children (11 and over) – school exclusions, early interventions	Yes	
Court disposals	Yes	
Out-of-court disposals – more likely to pick up early, preventative work	Yes	
Special educational needs or disabilities, EHCP/ILP (Wales)	Yes	
Custody		Small numbers, difficult to attribute deficits/strengths to non-custodial provision
Positive practice areas	Yes	
Protected characteristics	Yes	

In each inspection site, we sampled court disposals (including custodial release) and out-of-court disposals where the case met our criteria for inclusion.

Our fieldwork sought to address the following questions:

- Does the governance and leadership of the YOT support and promote the delivery of high-quality, personalised and responsive ETE services for children working with the youth offending team?
- Are staff within the YOT empowered to deliver a high-quality, personalised and responsive ETE service that meets the needs of all children?
- Is a comprehensive range of high-quality services in place, enabling personalised and responsive ETE provision to meet the needs of children?
- Is timely and relevant information available and are appropriate facilities in place to support a high-quality, personalised and responsive ETE approach for all children working with the YOT?
- Are assessments for ETE well informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers?
- Is planning for ETE well informed, holistic and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers?
- Are high-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated ETE services delivered?
- Is reviewing of progress for ETE well informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers?
- Is the impact of the pandemic in relation to ETE well managed by the YOT?
- Does evaluation of ETE outcomes demonstrate progress in relation to engagement, desistance and wellbeing, with a clear strategy for sustaining and building on these outcomes?

1.4. Report outline

Chapter	Content
2. Organisational delivery	Governance and leadership Staff Partnerships and services Data and information Innovations
3. Case management	Overall findings Further findings What the children said about working with YOTs
4. Post pandemic working	ETE delivery during and following the Covid-19 pandemic
5. Outcomes	What is being achieved?

2. Organisational delivery

2.1. Governance and leadership

We explored whether the governance and leadership of the YOT supports and promotes the delivery of high-quality, personalised and responsive ETE services for children working with the YOT.

We asked:

- Is there an effective local vision and strategy for the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive ETE service for all children?
- Do the partnership arrangements actively support effective ETE service delivery?
- Does the leadership of the YOT support effective service delivery for ETE?

Vision and strategy

In all of the YOTs we inspected, there was clear evidence that the importance of ETE had been articulated by the board. For some boards, this was in the form of a distinct ETE strategy or plan; in others, their approach to the delivery of ETE was embedded in a broader annual strategy or plan.

To be effective, YOT strategy needs to align with the local authority plans for children. This alignment was well described by a board chair as follows.

Good practice example

We established a multi-agency partnership vision for all children in the local authority, based on enabling all children to achieve their potential. Children need to be safe, be healthy, be educated, have opportunities and have their voices heard. We undertook a needs analysis across the local authority and that became the bedrock for the vision of how we want to work with children (including those working with the YOT). There is recognition of YOT children being vulnerable and systemically being disadvantaged or not having their needs met. We then adopted a youth crime prevention approach and brought this into our wider vision.

Partnership

We consistently saw strong links between the YOT, social care, education, police, health services and probation service colleagues. There was a broad acceptance across partners of child-first, trauma-informed ways of thinking about children's involvement in offending. YOTs are increasingly integrated into wider social care structures concerned with the provision of youth services, and this affords more joined-up approaches to the work.

Where the partnership, at board level, had identified a range of professionals to support the work of the YOT, intervention from the educational psychology service and speech and language therapists (SALTs) provided an assessment of the needs of the children and developed the skillset of the partnership. In one board, all partnership members had completed trauma-informed practice training. When provision for ETE was at its best, there had been a commitment to understand fully the needs of the children and the tenacity to make sure they get a good deal.

However, the strength of partnership representation on boards varied. Where education partners were strongly represented, there was evidence of strong integration of the YOT ambitions for children in the wider local authority. One board member stated that:

“Every child should be in ETE and undertaking activities which are relevant and appropriate to them. This should be the same as for any child in Leicester. ‘As if they were our own children’ is the motto”.

Where partners were represented appropriately at board level, this yielded well-resourced, specialist provision for those YOTs. This was lacking in others.

Good practice example

The Ofsted inspector observed:

“... all services seem to be united under the ‘Belonging in Bristol’ strategy that aims to challenge poor-quality provision for the most vulnerable in the city. There are some real tangible examples of outcomes in these partnerships and a promising sign for the future. Further work is now needed to refine this offer so that all partnership staff, children and their families know exactly what services are available for them”.

Leadership

Where boards functioned well to support effective delivery, consistent evaluation data and case studies were presented by YOT staff. Board members were then able to understand the journey of children and seek to develop working practices to address any identified shortcomings. Concerns about the quality of information are outlined in section 2.3.

In one inspected area, we noted that the leadership of the YOT was skilled, experienced and committed to high levels of engagement with ETE. They rightly knew that children are more likely to desist from crime if they are purposefully involved in ETE. The support and challenge of the dynamic leadership of the YOT meant that the service for children would constantly be moving forwards. The YOT leadership knew that more work is needed to ensure that all education providers embed high-quality provision effectively using the assessments created by the YOT, and they have already started on this. They also knew that too many 16–18-year-olds remain out of ETE. There was a clear strategy for reducing this number, and their actions have already proved successful in so doing.

In another area, the partnership provided a broad range of services to underpin the planning of effective ETE. Although some ETE providers have strong links with these services, these tend to concern statutory school-aged children or AP. Links with health services and community organisations provide emotional and therapeutic intervention and support for children when away from ETE. However, for some children who only attend provisions for one day a week, this could mean six days without ETE access. In our inspection, we located instances of children identified as having a provision but who had not attended for some time, and in a small number of cases for up to five years.

The governance and leadership of one YOT had seen significant change over the last few years. The YOT leadership and a highly involved, skilled and well-informed board had addressed many long-term systemic ETE issues. Current leaders and board members clearly understood the relative strengths and weaknesses. They understood that there was more to be done but had made considerable strides in this area. The multi-professional assessment on entry into the YOT was one of many developments supporting their work. However, more still needed to be done to enhance the work with educational settings, to use this assessment information adequately to inform provision.

Not all board chairs saw themselves as able to influence positively or direct the work of the YOT. Where staff groups were experienced and competent, it was the practitioners who held the work together, but we would have concerns that, over time, the absence of direction from the board could render the YOT vulnerable to changes in the external world relating to ETE provision.

Poor practice example

“We didn’t meet as a board in 2020 – I don’t think that boards drive practice – it is from the ground up.”

Conclusions and implications

- Boards prioritised ETE work consistently and this was linked strongly to child-first and trauma-informed approaches to work with children who offend.
- Not all board chairs saw themselves as positively influencing or directing the work of the YOT.
- The strength of partnership representation on boards varied. Where partners were strongly represented, there was evidence of strong integration of the YOT ambitions for children in the wider local authority. This yielded well-resourced, specialist provision for some YOTs, but this was lacking in others.

2.2. Staff

We explored whether staff within the YOT are empowered to deliver a high-quality, personalised and responsive ETE service that meet the needs of all children.

We asked:

- Did staff and workload levels support the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive ETE service for all children?
- Did the skills of YOT staff support the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive ETE service for all children?
- Did the oversight of the work of ETE staff support high-quality delivery and professional development?
- Were arrangements for learning and development comprehensive and responsive?
- Did managers pay sufficient attention to ETE staff engagement?

Staff and workload levels

All of the YOTs we inspected had either dedicated education staff to work with school-aged children or a well-developed set of arrangements to secure support in engaging with education. For children who were post-statutory school age, there was at least access to an information, advice and guidance specialist adviser. In some YOTs, the line management of these staff fell within the range of responsibilities of a YOT manager; for others, particularly information, advice and guidance specialists, line management remained with the home organisation of the specialist worker. For either circumstance, there was good evidence of effective working. All the specialist staff involved reported good levels of integration with the YOT and were able to access appropriate training in key areas, such as trauma-informed practice.

In our inspection, we paid attention, through detailed case inspection, to the role of the YOT case manager in coordinating the work with the child. In some YOTs, this involved providing cover for the role of education specialists at times when this service was disrupted. A number of staff suggested that they were less able than educational specialists to liaise effectively with schools and colleges in these circumstances.

The workloads of case managers were typically at a level where the requirements to provide a high-quality service were manageable and there was evidence of active management oversight of the demands of the work. The experience of one YOT case manager, described below, reflects a generally expressed view of working arrangements.

Good practice example

“It can vary, but we hold 8–9 cases. Some have other duties – for example, court or temporary cover of the ETE officer role. However, managers are responsive and considerate of workload. Also, there is a principle of trying to keep continuity when case managers have previously worked with children.”

Staff skills

We found many case examples where the intervention of the YOT case manager or a specialist worker had a marked effect in improving the child's access to ETE. For many children, the YOT involvement followed substantial periods of absence or disengagement from educational services. This is illustrated by the following example.

Good practice example

It wasn't until the YOT became involved that the child was then supported to obtain a place in the pupil referral unit (PRU) as of Jan 2022. Staff worked hard to engage the child and parents. Covid played a massive part – mum didn't have internet and the child was not interested in home learning. Without YOT involvement it might have been another 6 to 12 months before he got into education.

In one YOT, we found that the case manager group was an experienced and committed body of staff. They possessed a tenacity to advocate for the children they worked with, alongside a knowledge of the pathways needed to access those specialist interventions to address the assessed need of the YOT caseload. This tenacity was a consistent finding across the YOT staff members to whom we spoke.

YOT staff are skilled relationship builders, and this translates into positive working relationships. Case managers were well thought of by parents, offering an ear to listen, especially in the most challenging times. Parents had confidence that these staff were eager to do the best for their children to prevent the recurrence of crime.

There was a strong focus on the needs of the child and a preparedness to engage with education providers towards achieving the best possible outcome for them, as illustrated in the quote below.

Good practice example

"We are like Rottweilers! We battle and advocate and are tenacious in following this up on behalf of YOT children.

We can identify when children are coming through with potential unidentified needs and then we can advocate. We have an educational psychologist, speech and language therapist [and a] child and adolescent mental health (CAHMS) worker, and they are easily accessible."

For children, there were mixed responses to the case manager's approach. One child reported that:

"I discuss my progress with my worker and what I am doing and how well I am doing, and is there anything that I could improve with the right support; this is also where they ask me if I need any ongoing support and what with, if any."

Another child stated that:

"I have helped myself and my mum and dad helped me. I got nothing from the YOT team".

Learning and development

Without exception, staff in YOTs had received training or had clear operational guidance in respect of child criminal exploitation (CCE), child sexual exploitation (CSE) and trauma-informed working. There was a consistent understanding of the importance both of a child-first approach and understanding negative behaviour of children in the light of adverse childhood experiences and trauma.

In many areas, this understanding informed the local education system's approach, and YOTs were beacons of good practice in many of the areas inspected. Of value was the building of working relationships with children whose behaviour reflected the turmoil of adverse childhood experiences of abuse or neglect, or ongoing, traumatising life circumstances.

There was evidence of investment in the continuing professional development of YOT staff members, including access to externally awarded professional qualifications. We found a high level of skill and competence among the case manager groups, who were particularly effective when working closely with other specialist staff, providing proficient support and advocacy for the children.

Oversight of work

We would expect to see management oversight of ETE work through quality assurance, individual supervision and active contribution to concerns about the risk to the child's safety and wellbeing or risk of causing harm to others. The effectiveness of management oversight of the work delivered was variable. In one YOT, we found that this was effective in 81 per cent of the inspection sample of children's cases. This figure was as low as 34 per cent in another YOT.

When this was done well, the inspector found:

"There was a consistent focus on ETE in the recorded case discussions with management and it was good to see the issue around disclosure to potential employers being reviewed within these, given that the job involved working with children."

In a case where this was viewed as a deficit in the work with the child, the inspector commented:

"... management oversight was insufficient. Although there had been chairing and some oversight through enhanced case management, this did not remedy shortfalls in assessment, planning, review, and there was a lack of adequate delivery and contact with the child, when considering the risks and needs of the case."

ETE staff engagement

Throughout this inspection, we were impressed by the commitment shown by staff and partners working closely with the YOT to working positively and productively with children. There was a strong sense of mission and, in some of the YOTs, active participation in the process of the management board through case presentation and board discussions. One of the YOTs worked in the context of a children's trust and there was evidence of ETE staff being able to contribute directly to the shape of the trust's strategy. Many of the innovations described below (section 2.3) are led by staff seconded to the YOT.

Conclusions and implications

- Throughout the fieldwork, we found highly motivated, tenacious staff. This was the case for case managers and partnership staff.
- In the context of the complexity of children's lives, many staff experienced frustration at the lack of support for children either in an educational or training setting.
- Management oversight of the work was, in the main, to a good standard.
- In all YOTs, we found that staff had good access to training. However, where specialist ETE staff were in post, there was a marked reliance on the role, which led to some adverse issues when staffing was disrupted.

2.3. Partnerships and services

We explored whether a comprehensive range of high-quality services was in place, enabling personalised and responsive ETE provision to meet the needs of children. We asked:

- Is there a sufficiently comprehensive and up-to-date analysis of the profile of children, used by the YOT to deliver well-targeted ETE services?
- Does the YOT partnership provide the volume, range and quality of ETE services and interventions required to meet the needs of all children?

- Are arrangements with ETE-related statutory partners, providers and other agencies established, maintained and used effectively to deliver high-quality services?

Context

In England and Wales, full-time education is compulsory for all children between the ages of five and 16. All children in England are expected to continue in education or training until at least their 18th birthday, although in practice the vast majority of children continue until the end of the academic year in which they turn 18. Those aged 16 to 17 are required to remain in education and training in England, following Raising Participation Age legislation in 2013. In Wales, children may leave full-time education in the summer of the year in which they attain their 16th birthday.

All children who are of statutory school age are expected to be on roll at a school, either mainstream or special. Every child is entitled to full-time education (usually deemed to be approximately 25 hours per week for secondary school children, although, in exceptional circumstances, some children may be on reduced or part-time timetables because of their additional needs such as special educational needs, mental health, illness and/or behavioural difficulties.

A reduced or part-time timetable should only ever be a short-term arrangement, in agreement with the parent or carer, and with a view to increasing the child's timetable back up to full time (this can be gradual) as soon as possible through regular reviews. The parent, grandparent or carer must be able to supervise their child during the times when they are not in school. If the parent(s) works full time or there are concerns about appropriate supervision, then a part-time timetable is not feasible. Where professionals agree that a temporary part-time timetable is appropriate, good practice suggests that education reviews should take place every six weeks.

For children working with YOTs, there are significant obstacles to engagement with ETE. For at least one-third of our case sample, there was evidence of a neurodivergent condition which had an impact on the ability of the child to participate in education. At least one-quarter of the children had an EHCP (England) or an IDP (Wales), which describes a child's special educational needs, the support they need and the outcomes they would like to achieve.

We found marked differences between the ETE experiences of children working with YOTs and those in the mainstream population. The children in our inspected sample were far more likely to have been permanently excluded from school.

Table 3: School exclusions: comparison of children in the inspected YOTs case sample with exclusions by region

Region	% Permanent	% Permanent exclusions by region of England and Wales ²¹
Conwy and Denbighshire	31%	0.05% – Wales ²²
Camden	52%	0.04% – Inner London
Doncaster	76%	0.06% – Yorkshire and the Humber
Leicester	19%	0.06% – East Midlands
Bristol	58%	0.07% – South West
Salford	48%	0.08% – North West

²¹ Figures for England include primary and secondary schools. From: Department for Education. (2013). *Statistics: Exclusions*. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-exclusions>.

²² Welsh Government. (2021). *Permanent and Fixed-term Exclusions from Schools*. Available at <https://gov.wales/permanent-and-fixed-term-exclusions-schools>.

For children over the statutory age for school attendance, we found a much higher proportion who were NEET among those working with the YOT.

Table 4: Comparison of YOT caseload self-assessed NEET figure and Department for Education²³ and Welsh government²⁴ mainstream figures for the same local authorities

Region	% NEET in YOT caseload	% NEET in local authority ²⁵
Conwy and Denbighshire	17%	11.1% – Compared with the national figure for Wales ²⁶
Camden	23.5%	1.8%
Doncaster	23%	3.1%
Leicester City	29%	4.7%
Bristol	30%	3.5%
Salford	18%	4.8%

Volume, range and quality of ETE services

Almost all the YOTs inspected had developed their partnership to include access to specialist assessment of need, either in-house or by a well-established referral process. Commonly, there was access to specialist psychological support (either clinical, forensic or educational), speech and language therapy, and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) support. This reflected a shared understanding of the issues associated with children working with the YOT. Specialist assessment was provided to all children in some of the YOTs, but in others there were limitations based on risk or disproportionality factors. Characteristically, there was good access to speech and language assessments.

In one YOT, the SALT provided evidence that 70 per cent of the caseload had a speech and language problem, and that, of that group, 70 per cent had not previously been recognised as having these limitations. Throughout the inspection, we came across children with previously unidentified neurological conditions and the YOT staff appeared to be 'drawing a line in the sand'. Frequently, we saw referral to specialist assessment for autism spectrum disorder or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) being initiated for the first time in the child's life.

One board chair described the effective collaboration of the YOT and key partners, in the example below.

Good practice example

"It has developed over the last two to three years and we've built further on it over the last year. Particularly, we've developed relationships with the police. The deputy mayor is very passionate and committed to health and justice and is a key source of violence reduction unit (VRU) funding to allocate to preventative work. There is real oversight of youth crime and understanding the journeys of children involved in serious youth crime, and lessons can be learned. Child-friendly policing needs some further development and there's a spirit of learning from each other across the council. VRU

²³ Figures for England include primary and secondary schools. From: Department for Education. (2013). *Statistics: Exclusions*. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-exclusions>.

²⁴ Welsh Government. (2021). Permanent and Fixed-term Exclusions from Schools. Available at <https://gov.wales/permanent-and-fixed-term-exclusions-schools>.

²⁵ Data for 16–17-year-olds only. From: Department for Education. (2021). *NEET and Participation: Local Authority Figures*. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/neet-and-participation-local-authority-figures>.

²⁶ Data for 16–18-year-olds. From: Welsh Government. (2021). *Participation of Young People in Education and the Labour Market*. Available at <https://gov.wales/participation-young-people-education-and-labour-market>.

funding will continue – this will benefit in strands of work such as trauma-informed approaches. Integrated budgets with the clinical commissioning group (CCG) has ensured that we get the appropriate health investment as part of a joined-up approach to commissioning. The CCG invests heavily in commissioned services such as CAMHS and SALT, which clearly enables us to undertake the work with the complex YYS cohort.”

In a further example, the development of a substantial range of alternative providers across the town has supported ETE delivery effectively. The work completed by EPIC (Encouraging Potential Inspiring Change; see description in section 2.5) makes a significant difference to supporting children at risk of school exclusion to re-establish full-time education. As with the other alternative providers visited, at EPIC there is a clear focus on addressing why the child is known to the YOT and on providing access to high-quality ETE and promoting desistance.

In one YOT, we observed that:

“... in schools and colleges, it is unclear what is done with this [assessment] information. Some schools and colleges would suggest that they do their own assessments in these cases, and the YOT assessments are added to this. The partnership needs to continue developing this outreach into school and colleges to ensure that initial assessment is utilised well, and provision embedded”.

Where the multi-professional team at the YOT was strong in providing a detailed understanding of the child’s needs, many who accessed the YOT stood a better chance of getting the support required to meet their additional needs, such as special educational needs or disabilities.

In practice, YOT staff need the clarity of defined communication points with schools and colleges. This can then lead to wrap-around services both supporting and monitoring the child’s progress. In too many circumstances, we found that the experience of YOT staff was:

“...a lot of avoidance of school with some of the children in the YOT cohort”.

The use of part-time timetables and low attendance levels have a significant impact on the quality of implementation and delivery. Too many children known to the YOTs are on long-term part-time timetables and many do not even participate for enough time in these. This means that too many children are not appropriately supervised for extended periods. There is also variability in providers’ awareness of where the child is when away from ETE settings.

Data

There was variable access to data to inform the strategic and planning work of YOTs. While there is a national measure of performance set by the YJB, this does not appear to drive good engagement with education. The measure itself asks for data on a quarterly basis which identifies the number of children completing the period of supervision by the YOT in ETE. For school-aged children, there should be attendance at 25 hours of education, and for post-school-aged children there should be attendance at 16 hours of ETE. We found that local figures were not a reliable reflection of what was actually being provided.

Informed by the perspectives of Estyn and Ofsted inspectors, we found limitations in the YOTs’ access to educational information, such as school, college or training attendance, timetabling and behavioural concerns associated with possible exclusion from school. This information is critical in understanding children’s experience and supporting them through difficulties.

Where information-sharing at an individual level, and data exchange at an organisational level were not well-developed, there were adverse consequences for ETE delivery. In one YOT, we found that the incidence of part-time timetables, exclusion and absence were too high for many children. This had an impact on the ability of the partnership to access high-quality ETE. Too many children were identified as needing reduced timetables because the provision was not working, rather than identifying, assessing and planning to understand and overcome why it was not working.

Attendance was often also very poor, and providers were likely to be able to say why it was low but were not as clear about what they had done to address this. There was some evidence of unofficial exclusions, which affects how effectively partnerships can support those children.

At an individual level, paucity of information had an impact on what was achieved with the child. At an organisational level, the aggregated educational needs of children working with the YOT were not well identified. There was poor monitoring of children's attendance, particularly for those in mainstream education and attending colleges of further education.

Where data exchange has been well-developed, there was the opportunity for the YOT to access up-to-date information about the attendance and behaviour of children. We found exemplary practice in one YOT when children were placed in a PRU or AP. In this setting, the partnership with PRUs was a powerful way of making sure that these most vulnerable children attended full-time provision. If a child attends a specialist setting or PRU, they are more likely to access provision that meets their needs, promotes access to meaningful ETE and encourages desistance. In these cases, we found that providers value partnership with the YOT and worked hard to collaborate. As a result of this partnership, parents believed that their child was getting the best outcomes.

Conclusions and implications

- Key partner contributions were in the form of enhanced access to specialist services to assess the individual needs of children working with YOTs.
- Specialists also provided ongoing support to case management staff in respect of neurological conditions or communication needs.
- There was a broad range of support and access to a range of facilities to support ETE delivery and an enthusiasm for innovation.
- Processes and information-sharing with mainstream schools and colleges meant that there were limitations on what individual children could achieve.

2.4. Information and facilities

We explored whether timely and relevant information was available and appropriate facilities were in place to support a high-quality, personalised and responsive ETE approach for all children working with the youth offending team.

We asked:

- Do the policies and guidance in place enable staff to deliver a high-quality ETE service, meeting the needs of all children?
- Do the YOTs' delivery environment(s) meet the needs of all children and enable staff to deliver a high-quality ETE service?
- Do the information and communications technology (ICT) systems enable staff to deliver a high-quality ETE service, meeting the needs of all children?
- Are analysis, evidence and learning used effectively to drive improvement in ETE services?

Policies and guidance

We found extensive documentation to support staff to deliver effective services. At a strategic level, there was a clear alignment between the YOT strategy and the stated intentions of the local authorities to provide inclusive, equal access to education.

The operational staff groups were made up of experienced, knowledgeable practitioners. All had clarity about the purpose of their work and continually sought to balance the needs of children with the often-competing concerns about risks to the child's safety and wellbeing, and the risks that they may present to other people. Policies and practical guidance were available in every YOT, and these were up to date and reviewed regularly.

Delivery environments

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, most of our inspection was conducted remotely and, therefore, we were not able to see directly the delivery environments in which ETE services took place.

ICT systems

The effective management of data at an organisational level and sharing of information at an individual level are vital to the delivery of high-quality ETE. We identified errors in recording as to whether a child was attending the intended provision, and whether the provider was accurately identified, in a small number of cases.

Most YOTs have access to data which informs their understanding of ETE needs, but many lack the capacity to monitor and interrogate key aspects of the children's experience, such as the use of part-time timetables, the extent and quality of review of EHCPs, and their attendance levels. This is problematic for the partnership and at an individual, casework level.

In one area, the inspector identified the following example.

Poor practice example

We found issues around the wider cohort data and how the board uses that data. There is analysis at operational level, but not necessarily at board level. Accepted that this needs to be better. Data is there, it's just not formalised with structure and purpose.

We found two examples of the application of data management products (Power Bi) which had the potential to transform what is known about the ETE needs of children working with the YOT, and the progress of those on the YOT caseload (Newcastle and Salford).

In Salford, we found that information-sharing systems were robust and getting stronger. Case records were detailed and provided a central space for all information, assessments, plans and reviews. This meant that it was easy to understand what provision is in place for children. Leaders would like to enhance this system further by making sure that records from mental health services reflect the vital work they do with children known to the YJS. They were also aware that sometimes there can be a delay in receiving updates on changes in the provision by some education settings.

Analysis, evidence and learning

Whether driven directly by the board, or by the management group, there was a strong and active commitment to seeking new and innovative ways of working, and initiatives like the Reach project (see section 2.5) were subject to rigorous external evaluation.

For others, despite good links with the local authorities, there was limited systematic data analysis, so little was understood about why some children remained NEET or what happened after training courses had been completed.

A range of quality checks, peer reviews, audit reports and action plans were in use to support the delivery of services, and ETE performance featured in many of these processes. Where boards worked well, these outputs were reviewed and there were systems in place to cascade findings to operational staff. We formed the view, however, that key elements of ETE were yet to be addressed.

We found that all YOTs were rightly concerned about receiving and understanding the voice of the child or their parents or carers. In one YOT, the use of the Lundy model of participation had been adopted by the local authority. This approach seeks to use ideas of space, voice, audience and influence in order to listen to and act on the views expressed. There was evidence of children's views being gathered and, to some extent, taken into account when developing services. YOTs were typically seeking to consult with children or their parents or carers but their methods often fell

short of direct participation in the work or development of services. While individual cases were presented to boards, the direct voice of the child or their parents or carers was absent.

Conclusions and implications

- YOT management boards were not always aware of school exclusion rates of YOT children. Part-time timetables were not monitored and reviewed, meaning that too frequently attendance was well below the statutory requirement.
- There is no clear process of review in place for children with an EHCP or ILP, whether the child is of school age or older.
- YOT management boards were not sufficiently aware of the attendance levels of YOT children at their college or training provision.

2.5. Innovation

We saw a clear commitment to innovation, and we have captured more detail of the range of approaches in our effective practice guide.²⁷ The following pen pictures give a sense of the nature and purpose of some of these developments.

	Resource	Details
Conwy and Denbighshire (in conjunction with Gwynedd Môn Youth Justice Service)	Bangor University – wellbeing and resilience checklist	Caseworkers have begun to use a tool that measures the progress that children make in building resilience, which helps children recognise how they are developing this aspect of their behaviour. This tool offers the potential for enabling the service to evaluate the impact of caseworkers’ interventions with clients.
Camden	CRiB – The Camden Reintegration Base	This offers a seven-week programme for secondary students in years 7 to 9 of any Camden school who are at risk of permanent exclusion.
	King’s Cross Employment Project – King’s Cross Estate services and KX Recruit	This provides paid work experience opportunities and support for children who are struggling to participate in ETE or to access the job market.
Doncaster	EPIC – Encouraging Potential Inspiring Change	This is an alternative learning provision. It was originally created for children at risk of exclusion as a result of knife-related incidents on school sites. It is not exclusively for children in the criminal justice system, and places are allocated through the council’s inclusion panel. The inspector noted of this AP that, <i>“... here children’s perceptions of crime are challenged while they are supported and confidence built. The short-term nature of this provision is effective in providing a long-term benefit.”</i>
	Dyslexia screening	Every child working with the YOT can access a dyslexia screening from a trained assessor (education coordinator working in the team).

²⁷ HM Inspectorate of Probation. (2022). *ETE Effective Practice Guide*.

Leicester City	Resource	Details
	The Reach programme	This is a Violence Reduction Network-funded project to identify and work to support children who are at risk of suspension from school due to violent behaviour. It is also there for children who are struggling in school and possibly missing education to the extent to which temporary and permanent exclusions may result. It aims at reaching children at the earliest point before they are excluded, or missing episodes escalate. It seeks to reduce behaviours associated with serious violence, reduce exclusion from school, reduce knife crime, reduce serious violence and increase positive school outcomes (attendance and attainment).
Case management and diversity panel	Resource	Details
	N/A	All children subject to custodial sentences are reviewed by a multi-agency panel (the case management and diversity panel), which is chaired by the service manager. The panel's terms of reference highlight that it is open for children to be referred into where they are at high risk of reoffending, there is a high risk to their safety and wellbeing or there is a high risk of causing serious harm to others. All children in that category are referred, as well as all custody and remand cases. However, cases that are of concern, where there may have been significant changes in personal circumstances, can be referred, as well as any child where a diversity discussion would be of benefit to their progress. Agencies represented include information, advice and guidance, CAMHS, substance misuse and parenting workers, to ensure that children's safeguarding, risk of harm, welfare and mental health needs are assessed
Bristol	Resource	Details
	Safer options hub	This is an example of exemplary practice in strategic planning and high-quality outcomes. As the hub is contained within safeguarding, it requires schools, colleges and other education settings to develop a response to violence and exploitation.
	Reboot West	This supports care leavers between the ages of 16 and 25 into ETE in four local authorities: Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. The project provides support for up to three years, with coaches trained in using acceptance and commitment therapy, a psychological approach that helps children to build commitment and make positive choices.
Salford	Resource	Details
	AQA awards	These qualifications are mapped across all areas of intervention work undertaken by the YOT. This supports the aim that no child will leave the YOT without some form of accreditation and this is celebrated formally at an awards ceremony.

3. Case management

3.1. Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Delivery, Review (ASPIRE)

In our case inspection, we used the ASPIRE model, on which our core inspection standards are based.

Overall findings

Assessment

We explored whether assessments for ETE were well informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.

We asked:

- Does case assessment demonstrate that the caseworker understands the ETE needs of the child?
- Is the child meaningfully involved in the assessment of ETE?
- Is the child's parent or carer meaningfully involved in the assessment of ETE?
- Does the assessment of ETE sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?

Table 5: Assessment: Averages and range of scores for inspection sample from across all six sites (n = 181)

Expectations	Average inspection sufficiency scores (% yes)	Range of scores (% yes)
Does case assessment (including interview) demonstrate that the caseworker understands the ETE needs of the child?	80%	59–92%
Is the child meaningfully involved in the assessment of ETE?	91%	66–100%
Is the child's parent or carer meaningfully involved in the assessment of ETE?	78%	47–97%
Does the assessment of ETE sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	74%	58–94%

We found that initial and ongoing assessment of ETE needs were generally robust. A strong collaborative approach includes case managers, education officers, SALTs, educational psychologists, mental health workers, information, advice and guidance and other appropriate services. Many specialists and social care workers spoke positively of the work completed by YOT workers. Where there was transparent collaboration from the most relevant and appropriate services, the initial assessment was usually robust and was often the first needs assessment completed in the child's life. This 'draws a line in the sand' and raises the profile of the needs of the children. Contributions from SALTs were a particular strength in the assessment process when these were made available.

Planning

We explored whether planning for ETE was well informed, holistic and personalised, actively involving the child and their parent or carer.

We asked:

- Does planning demonstrate that the caseworker has considered the ETE needs of the child?
- Is the child meaningfully involved in the planning of ETE?
- Is the child’s parent or carer meaningfully involved in the planning of ETE?
- Does the planning of ETE focus sufficiently on supporting the child’s desistance?

Table 6: Planning: Averages and range of scores for inspection sample across all six sites (n = 181)

Expectations	Average: inspection sufficiency scores (% yes)	Range of scores (% yes)
Does planning demonstrate that the caseworker has fully considered the ETE needs of the child?	82%	56–97%
Is the child meaningfully involved in the planning of ETE?	84%	59–100%
Is the child’s parent or carer meaningfully involved in the planning of ETE?	72%	34–90%
Does the planning of ETE focus sufficiently on supporting the child’s desistance?	78%	53–97%

We found that planning for ETE was inconsistent across YOT partnerships. Too many children were not attending for the required hours. In one YOT, there were plans for over 60 per cent of the cases we reviewed to participate in their setting on a part-time timetable. This had been the case for extended periods. Although the national guidance identified that part-time timetables must always be time limited, there was little evidence that the arrangements in this YOT were short term.

Implementation and delivery

We explored whether high-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated ETE services were delivered.

We asked:

- Does the delivery of services meet the ETE needs of the child?
- Is the education provision of sufficient quality to support the ETE needs of the child effectively?

Table 7 outlines the extent to which children’s ETE needs are met. We were interested in the extent to which ETE interventions accounted for the needs of the child. We wanted to know that reasonable steps were taken to adjust service delivery in line with identified needs, that there were active steps taken to engage with the child and their parent or carer, and that YOT staff were actively involved with other professionals working with the child.

Table 7: Delivery: Averages and range of scores for inspection sample from across all six sites (n = 180)

Expectations	Average inspection sufficiency scores (% yes)	Range of scores (% yes)
Does the delivery of services meet the ETE needs of the child?	74%	61–88%
Is the education provision of sufficient quality to support the ETE needs of the child effectively?	70%	63–77%

We found examples of case records that did not accurately reflect the current provision and challenges for the children. Information-sharing was not always done well enough and there was variability in the relationships between the YOT and education providers. While some providers spoke highly of the work of case managers in communicating and challenging, this was not always the case. As a result of the variability in case management, it was unclear how well information was shared within the partnership.

Review

We explored whether reviewing of progress for ETE was well informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.

We asked:

- Does reviewing demonstrate that the caseworker fully considers the ETE needs of the child?
- Is the child meaningfully involved in reviewing their ETE?
- Is the child’s parent or carer meaningfully involved in reviewing their ETE?
- In reviewing, is there sufficient focus on supporting the child’s ETE needs?

Table 8: Review: Averages and range of scores for inspection sample from across all six sites (n = 181)

Expectations	Average inspection sufficiency scores (% yes)	Range of scores (% yes)
Does reviewing demonstrate that the caseworker fully considered the ETE needs of the child?	74%	38–96%
Is the child meaningfully involved in reviewing their ETE?	78%	44–100%
Is the child’s parent or carer meaningfully involved in reviewing their ETE?	66%	28–87%
Does reviewing of ETE focus sufficiently on supporting the child’s ETE needs?	74%	39–96%

We found that where high-quality reviewing had taken place, there was a significantly positive difference to children’s progress. In one YOT, the work of the ‘enhanced case management’ project

was particularly noticeable. In these cases, reviews were frequent and had tangible outcomes and results. They were multi-professional and YOTs engaged well with ETE providers. However, this was not always the case, and in some instances, it was unclear who had been involved in the review. Some providers told us that the lack of communication from the YOT meant that they had not shared information about how well the child was doing or what challenges they were facing.

3.2. Further findings

Although this is a broadly encouraging set of findings, the range of scores above demonstrates that there was variability in the quality of work between YOTs. Our data shows that for some groups of children, the quality of work was worryingly insufficient. What follows is a set of further findings based on analysis of the characteristics of the children that formed part of our case sample. We compared each characteristic with the rest of the sample using a Z-score, enabling us to compare two scores from different samples. Where the word 'significant' is used in this text, it means that we have identified a statistically significant difference between the identified sub-group and the rest of the sample.

3.3. Out-of-court disposal cases

Children working with the YOT as part of an out-of-court disposal (61 cases) were significantly less likely to have an effective plan of work. The needs of the child were not fully considered in 31 per cent of cases, they were less likely to be meaningfully involved in 25 per cent of cases and there was insufficient focus on supporting the child's desistance in 32 per cent of cases.

The length of time that a child will work with the YOT as part of an out-of-court disposal is, on average, three months. This is a challenging timescale. The children whose cases we saw were as complex, in terms of risk and need, as those who were subject to post-court disposals. Despite these challenges, a clear plan can be developed effectively, as demonstrated in the example below.

Good practice example

There was some indirect focus on ETE via the planned work around emotional regulation, given her aggressive behaviour in school previously. However, given Laura's needs and the history of educational placements breaking down, it was good to see effective planning activity around supporting her ETE needs specifically. For example, at the time, Laura was pregnant and, via several professionals' meetings, which the AP were engaged in throughout, there was clear consideration given to how her ETE needs will be met after the imminent arrival of her child. Laura was involved in each step and the plan, collaboratively made, involved Laura returning to school after a period of maternity leave. The AP had worked to build an effective relationship with Laura, using the 'triangle of 3' to ensure that there was always a trusted member of staff available to support her, and provided her with a laptop to keep her engaged in education during the maternity leave. It was clear that all agencies were working together effectively to reach the same goal of helping Laura to realise her potential while at the same time becoming a parent for the first time.

For children working with the YOT as part of an out-of-court disposal, reviews were significantly less likely to be sufficient in understanding needs (38 per cent), demonstrating meaningful involvement (31 per cent) and having parent or carer involvement (42 per cent).

Overview

We found examples of exceptional assessment work being undertaken with children subject to out-of-court disposals. This was characterised by comprehensive assessments, based on appropriate identification and use of information about the child's education history. The planning and reviewing of ETE needs, however, were too frequently of a poor standard. The needs and risk associated with these children were often complex and YOTs should appraise the extent to which resources are available to children who enter the justice system through this avenue.

Children who had been excluded from school

Where children had been excluded from school (115 cases), significantly fewer assessments were of sufficient quality. In 22 per cent of cases, the needs of excluded children were not well understood, compared with nine per cent where there had been no school exclusion.

When assessment work is done well, it provides a comprehensive basis for work with the child, is rigorous in marshalling multiple sources of evidence and provides the basis for constructive work. This is demonstrated in the example below.

Good practice example

The assessment contains an extensive history of concerns relating to Freda's care history; early childhood trauma; changes in schools and children's homes; missing from care; risk of CSE and CCE; attempts of suicide; emerging personality disorder; and history of assaults and criminal damage against care and education staff. The YOT officer has access to a number of sources of information when undertaking her assessment of Freda, which includes:

- previous YOT assessment and information from child view;
- forensic CAMHS assessment; and an up-to-date CAMHS risk assessment and management plan;
- a psychological assessment dated three years prior to the start of the order;
- EHCP completed one year previously;
- up-to-date child-in-care plan and risk assessment;
- Freda's pathway plan relating to her;
- a speech, language and communication assessment dated three years prior;
- an up-to-date transition plan in reference to a deprivation of liberty safeguard (DOLS) in light of her move from a secure hospital placement into a new care placement;
- the minutes to regular strategy discussions following an attempt by Freda to kill herself following discharge from the hospital placement and prior to the imposition of the YRO [youth rehabilitation order].

In relation to a child excluded from school, the following example provided no information about current circumstances. Reliance on older information meant that the caseworker had not understood the child's life adequately. There was a clear deficit in management oversight of this case, in that the quality of assessment work was not remedied by the case manager's supervisor, despite the needs of the child being identified by the existing EHCP.

Poor practice example

No initial assessment was completed upon commencement of the order – AssetPlus refers to an old order and is dated Oct 2020 (child received current YRO on 11/8/21). Assessment does not include or sufficiently reference the child's special educational needs assessment or EHCP.

For children who had been excluded from school, there was a significant difference in the delivery and quality of services that were available, compared with non-excluded children. In 29 per cent of cases, the delivery was insufficient and in 32 per cent of cases, the effectiveness of support was also insufficient. The children most in need of ETE services were the least likely to be engaged in high-quality ETE provision.

Summary

In our case sample, 65 per cent of the children had been excluded from school. Assessment of these children was not consistently good enough, despite them often presenting with the highest levels of need. The delivery of ETE work was too frequently of insufficient quality.

3.4. School-aged children

For school-aged children working with the YOT, planning was significantly worse than for post-school-aged children. In 24 per cent of cases, children were insufficiently involved in the planning process and there was insufficient focus on supporting the child's desistance in 29 per cent of cases.

Although many cases inspected had high-quality planning work, some planning was disrupted by the complexity and chaos of the child's life. In a small number of cases, the absence of planning was simply poor practice.

Summary

Although assessment work was mostly sufficient, the extent of child involvement in planning for ETE was insufficient in too many cases, and the practical and emotional support of this key desistance activity by YOT staff and education providers was concerningly low in too many cases.

3.5. EHCP/IDP

For children with an EHCP or ILP (50 cases), there was significantly less engagement of the child and their parent or carer in the assessment process than for others. In 20 per cent of cases inspected, the child was not meaningfully involved in the process and in 32 per cent of assessments, there was no parent or carer involvement.

Planning for children with an EHCP or IDP was, in relation to all our planning questions, significantly worse than for others. Children's needs were not considered sufficiently in 29 per cent of cases, meaningful involvement of the child was insufficient in 28 per cent of cases, 39 per cent had limited parental or carer involvement in planning and, for 35 per cent, there was insufficient focus on supporting the child's desistance. EHCPs and ILPs were overlooked too frequently by YOT staff, as demonstrated in the example below.

When the EHCP or IDP was overlooked or not properly considered in the assessment, it would be expected that the quality of work being delivered would be poor. Significantly, in 46 per cent of these cases the delivery of services was insufficient, in terms of meeting the child's needs, and in 48 per cent of cases the quality of provision was insufficient to meet the needs of the child.

Where the case manager assessed and planned well, considered all available information and engaged with appropriate specialists, the delivery of services was maintained at a good standard, as the following case example illustrates.

Good practice example

There has understandably been a strong focus around Jane's ongoing risks, escalation in the seriousness of her offending, unstable living arrangements and chaotic lifestyle, and difficulties in establishing the degree to which mental health and cognitive functioning impacted on her behaviour. Nevertheless, ETE remained a key feature in the management of the case. There was evidence of good multi-agency working, with escalation to senior management when necessary, to address these issues, and, although not clearly recorded, Jane's school was engaged in all relevant professional meetings. It was recognised that her lack of engagement with education/constructive activities places her at higher risk of engaging in risky and reckless behaviours, and an action was set for the case manager to undertake a consultation with the educational psychologist. Again, although not clearly recorded, this took place and the educational psychologist attended the recent EHCP review meeting.

Where the focus on the EHCP or ILP was poor, the quality of delivery was compromised, as shown in the following example.

Poor practice example

Overall, this is a child with an EHCP who is out of school for a significant amount of time – recorded as since Covid started, due to a family member being vulnerable. There is insufficient information available about work which has happened to support the child and the family. It is evidenced that family are not always open to support in this area, but there is then a lack of follow-up to establish why or what can be done about this. There is, overall, a clear lack of delivery to support ETE and improve attendance. When things do happen to improve attendance, it is unclear how this has happened or what the actual impact of it is. The new case manager was not aware of attendance at the end of the order, which had improved slightly.

For children with an EHCP or IDP, the sufficiency of review work was significantly worse than for those who did not. The needs of the child were not fully considered in 42 per cent of cases, the child was not meaningfully involved in 33 per cent of cases and there was insufficient focus on supporting the child's needs in 42 per cent of cases.

When this was done well, the YOT partnership worked towards shared goals with children, as outlined in the example below.

Good practice example

There are regular and comprehensive reviews undertaken in a range of different formats. The YOS is also a key driver in calling different reviews, such as child protection reviews and EHCP reviews, to ensure that these happen and that they are effective in supporting W. Another key strength is the ECM [enhanced case management] supervision, which enables the case manager to review the case with the clinical psychologist regularly.

The level of complexity presented by some children's lives meant that ETE issues would frequently be put to one side, as described in the following example, where the inspector found that:

“The child's complexity and the instability of care arrangements and placements, along with multiple adverse childhood experiences and indicators impacting on safety and wellbeing (child criminal exploitation, substance misuse, family instability, use of the National Referral Mechanism for potential victims of modern slavery), all overshadowed any focus on ETE”.

This is a fundamental challenge for the work of YOTs, where the prospects of successful intervention can be derailed by extreme factors in the child's life.

Summary

Cases that included EHCPs or ILPs were the least well-managed group. Too frequently, the defined needs of the child were missed in assessment, and this then meant that fewer children had good plans, that they received less acceptable levels of service and that they were too often poorly reviewed.

3.6. Children with disabilities

When the child had a disability (65 cases), we found significant differences in the extent to which delivery met their needs. In 35 per cent of these cases, this was found to be insufficient. In terms of supporting the ETE needs of the child, this figure was 34 per cent.

Summary

The delivery of services for children with identified disabilities frequently failed to address the support needed to sustain the child in education. The most prevalent disabilities were learning or other cognitive disability, and we estimated that in half of the cases where a disability was identified, this disability would have a marked effect on the child's functioning.

Children who had been released under investigation by the police

Where the child had been arrested and released under investigation during the period of supervision by the YOT, we found that the caseworker did not plan sufficiently for the ETE needs of the child in 31 per cent of cases. This was significantly worse than for the rest of the children in our case sample. It is evident that, among the children released under investigation (28 in total), there was a high degree of disengagement from ETE services.

For these children, we found significant shortfalls in the quality of work being undertaken. In 26 per cent of cases, the work was insufficient, in terms of meeting the child's needs, and in 48 per cent of cases, the ETE work was insufficient to meet the needs of the child.

Summary

A relatively small number of children had been released under investigation. It was clear that the suspicion of further offending had a disruptive effect on the YOT's work with the child. In one case, for example, there was a delay of over a year between initial arrest and eventual out-of-court disposal. This group had lower levels of engagement. YOTs should consider how to engage better with and motivate this group of children.

3.7. The Children's views about working with the YOT

User Voice provided us with the views of 29 children, all of whom formed part of our inspection sample of cases.

What children said about assessment:

"They should add regular breaks to sessions, as in my own case I have ADHD and it is hard for me to stay focused for long periods of time, so my learning would be better if I had frequent breaks".

"They could only offer group work, which is no good for me because I can't concentrate in groups. I have to be one to one or around people I know to learn new things".

What children said about planning:

"It would be helpful to have a plan with a bit more understanding".

"Think we do [have a plan] but not 100 per cent sure. It would be helpful but not sure if I have one".

"The plan should be clearer and provided to you, so you understand what it is and what it involves".

What children said about implementation and delivery:

One child gave a very glowing account of her experience of working with the YOT, as described by an inspector:

"She had been assessed and felt involved in the assessment for learning difficulties, and transferred to a specialist school that covers people with ADHD and learning difficulties. She felt that she was given ETE options, that she was included in the decision and supported at every stage. What really shone through was the YOS's ability to advocate for her educational needs and support her 'through the rough times I have had throughout my journey'.

She had regular check-ins, regardless of Covid-19, through phone or FaceTime, and stated that 'support carried on even if I couldn't have anyone round my house due to restrictions'.

She was currently completing a number of different courses, that covered academic, behaviour and life skills. She was also completing a SPICE course, which is designed for those with learning

disabilities. She had high aspirations for her future and wanted to move on from her offending behaviour and 'get good grades to get myself a good job'. She reported positive outcomes of 'better behaviour' and said, 'I have improved so much since having YOT behind me'".

One spoke less favourably about their experience:

*"These people from uni don't get us, they get paid in set hours. Not 'they' as in 'you' because I know you been through s**t, I can hear it, like I can't even see your face but I can tell, I feel stupid not even knowing you but I know you get me, but these guys want to give me advice they learnt from a book, yeah, they go to college and uni, learn from the government and then they want to try and give me, don't ever give me advice, yeah, if you haven't lived it. You got more money and textbooks than truths or life experience. They would never call me after 5. They just act like they have to work with these snotty kids to pay their mortgage. I didn't ask for this s**t, I didn't want it, but they act like we enjoy it and are burdening them. I never bother talking to nobody like this because they just sit there, I know if they get me, and I know you get me, which is making me thrive of it, it makes me wanna tell you exactly how I'm feeling about everything".*

What children said about reviewing:

In the main, children valued the relationship that they had with their YOT worker.

"[My YOT worker] helped me a lot. She was very flexible with appointments and she is very good at her job".

"They have helped me by telling me straight about the consequences of my actions".

"I have been helped with trying to get into education".

"Because they are supportive in a sense of when you need them, they stand by you and actually understand and tell you what you are doing wrong and what not to do".

"They only do the job for money, yeah, these YOT and social workers, they don't care. They can help people without money but they're all so bothered about what time they finish. They should do better".

4. Covid-19 pandemic

4.1. ETE delivery during the pandemic

We considered whether the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in relation to ETE was well managed by YOTs. We expected to see that:

- where the pandemic had disrupted the child’s access to or ability to participate in ETE, this was addressed
- the YOT had taken sufficient action to enable the delivery of ETE to the child
- there was an appropriate ETE recovery plan in place for each child.

Table 9: Post-pandemic work

Post-pandemic work	Aggregate	
	#	%
Has the pandemic disrupted the child’s access to or ability to participate in ETE?		
Yes	93	51%
No	88	49%
Has the YOT taken sufficient action to enable the delivery of ETE to the child?		
Yes	144	82%
No	32	18%
Have ETE providers/agencies taken sufficient action to enable delivery of ETE to the child?		
Yes	135	77%
No	40	23%
Is there an appropriate ETE recovery plan in place for the child?		
Yes	128	74%
No	46	26%

In just over half of the children’s cases, ETE work – be it school placement, college attendance, training or employment – had been disrupted by the pandemic. We found a range of strategies in place to mitigate the impact of the disruption.

In all areas where schools remained open for the children of key workers, and for children who were deemed vulnerable, this included children working with YOTs.

YOT staff showed great flexibility in finding ways to maintain contact with children throughout the pandemic, in order to provide support.

Good practice example

The caseworker identified that the child had found gaining employment hard as a result of the pandemic. In addition, it was explained that there had been some barriers in intervention work due to the pandemic and the moving of the YOT to a new building. Both reduced the opportunity for face-to-face contact, and referral to other staff which had been available previously – including unit award schemes and Duke of Edinburgh Award. However, the caseworker did identify opportunities for individual work, such as undertaking sessions fishing with the child.

All YOTs sought to address issues concerning access to laptop computers, dongles and Wi-Fi rental, to support children's ongoing ETE work during the pandemic. In many cases, practical assistance with elements of schooling was also provided.

Good practice example

Prior to this order, Ben had transitioned from primary to secondary school. This had undoubtedly been impacted by the pandemic and lockdowns which occurred. During prevention work, the YOT supported the child during home schooling, and worked with the school to ensure they provided paperwork packs. It was commented by the caseworker that perhaps the secondary school had just assumed that this child had access to the internet and a laptop.

In one YOT, and this was typical of the supportive approaches we observed, we found that the YOT's response to the pandemic started in the early stages. In one YOT, within two weeks of the England and Wales lockdown, YOT staff were engaging with education settings to support children and challenge schools to keep pupils in school due to their vulnerabilities. As a result of this, these children continued to have access to valuable support at a time when many other services were not able to engage with them.

5. Outcomes

For this inspection, we devised a set of outcome measures, in conjunction with Estyn and Ofsted. Many of the children had experienced disruptions to their education and much of the YOT's work involved securing the engagement of children in ETE settings. In anticipation of this, we introduced a range of measures which would give an indication of the progress being made, including the achievement of soft skills, and improved attendance and behaviour. We were keen, however, also to gather information about tangible educational outcomes in the form of credits and qualifications. We explored whether the evaluation of ETE outcomes demonstrate progress in relation to engagement, desistance and wellbeing, with a clear strategy for sustaining and building upon these outcomes.

We looked for:

- the attainment of qualifications/credits
- the achievement of soft skills
- positive progression to ETE options
- an effective career plan
- improved literacy and numeracy
- satisfactory attendance
- satisfactory behaviour.

Table 10: Educational progress identified in the case sample by the inspector

Outcomes	Number of outcomes
What were the outcomes identified in this case?	
Attainment of qualifications/credits	26
Achievement of soft skills	86
Positive progression to ETE options	73
Effective career plan	34
Improved literacy and numeracy	20
Improved attendance	110
Satisfactory behaviour	89
No outcomes identified	35

In all of the YOTs inspected, we were able to identify tangible outcomes, which were attributable to the ETE work being delivered in over 80 per cent of cases. Engagement in a variety of innovative schemes (see section 2.5) supported children in working towards ETE achievements. In many instances, the child was given practical assistance – for example, with transport, to maintain attendance, which was an area of improvement in over 60 per cent of cases.

Our expectation is that all children should receive ETE provision appropriate to their needs and offering clear progression. This should improve the life chances of the child. In the next example, the inspector found multiple benefits for the child when securing employment.

Good practice example

The impact the employment has had on his behaviour has been substantial, with no further intelligence of County Lines involvement and no evidence of further offending; an improved relationship with his mother; a stable income which has helped to develop improved financial management skills; a clear improvement in his self-esteem and confidence in his ability to achieve his life goals.

The skill and experience of case managers can provide additional support to education providers in sustaining children in education, as the next example demonstrates.

Good practice example

Appointments were delivered by the case manager in school (just after lunch) and coordinated with the head of year and safeguarding lead. Information-sharing and liaison was evident throughout, in terms of coordinating YOT work and helping to maintain the engagement of the child. Of note was the recognition and action by the case manager in establishing the child was a visual learner and adapting his communication and delivering work to take account of the child's age (10) and understanding.

Also of note is that after the completion of the out-of-court disposals and closure of the case, the school had returned to the YOT two months later, as further work had been undertaken by the school to access support for further assessment for neurodivergent pathways. The YOT had spoken to the school about the work completed and offered input to support this ongoing addressing of the child's needs.

Provision such as a PRU or AP should be used primarily as a temporary measure, and in the next example the child was reintegrated into mainstream education following improved behaviour and attendance. The YOTs are dependent on partners delivering services which are appropriate to the child's needs, and in this example the flow of information between the PRU and the case manager encouraged ownership of the process by the child and their parent.

Good practice example

Fred is now attending a mainstream secondary school on a full timetable. This is following a period of time at a PRU, after being permanently excluded from his previous secondary school after [being found in] possession of a bladed article. Feedback from the PRU was very positive, and it was quickly identified that he could return to mainstream school. He received a speech and language assessment, which concluded that there were no concerns. Much of the work for ETE has been completed by the PRU. Case manager has had awareness of what is happening but has allowed Fred's mother and school professionals to take the lead. This appears to be appropriate in this case. The case manager identified that she had enough regular contact with the PRU and Fred's mother should there have been any concerns about ETE.

Tangible progress was identified in several cases, including the achievement of Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) accreditation, a qualification required on most construction sites. The inspector identified that the level of support required to get the child to complete the course successfully was provided by a well-established working relationship.

Good practice example

Harry accessed support from a specialist adviser for careers. Harry had already worked with the adviser since his youth restorative order, and this work had carried on to this current order. There was a careers plan put in place. Harry was also supported by caseworker to attend the CSCS course with the relevant provider. This included taking Harry to and from sessions. Overall, there was appropriate and sufficient support

Conclusion

Many of the children working with the YOTs had suffered high levels of disruption to their ETE, some over many years. This disruption was commonly associated with the challenging behaviour of the child. Encouragingly, the understanding of this behaviour as part of a set of needs which have to be addressed was increasingly prevalent among key partnership organisations. YOTs were identifying significant unrecognised neurological conditions as a result of assessments that benefited from specialist input or oversight. The recognition of adverse childhood experiences, trauma-informed ways of understanding children's behaviour and child-first approaches were becoming well established in all of the YOTs we inspected.

Improvements we identified were mainly in better engagement with ETE or the development of improved social skills. These improvements need to be the basis of planning for progression, rather than an end in themselves. This is particularly relevant to out-of-court cases, where the period of engagement with the child is often short.

There remains, however, a level of acceptance of relatively poor outcomes for too many of the children working with YOTs. Given that level 2 in English and mathematics is the standard for entry into the workplace, it is noteworthy that the improvement in literacy and numeracy levels we identified remains very low when set against children who are not working with the YOT.

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Taylor, C. (2016). *Review of the Youth Justice System in England and Wales*. London: Ministry of Justice. Available at: [Review of the Youth Justice System \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/544216/youth-justice-review-report.pdf)

Annexe 1: Methodology

During the course of this inspection, in December 2021 and January 2022, we examined the quality of work delivered by youth offending teams (YOTs) in Conwy and Denbighshire, Camden, Doncaster, Leicester City, Bristol and Salford. As a result of the circumstances of restrictions associated with the pandemic, we undertook five remote inspections and one face-to-face inspection.

We examined 181 cases of children working with the YOTs (120 post-court cases and 61 out-of-court disposal cases). We also conducted 54 meetings with staff, partners and stakeholders. Our colleagues from Estyn and Ofsted conducted further interviews with key education providers (schools, colleges, alternative provision (AP), pupil referral units (PRUs)) and partnership staff.

We commissioned the services of User Voice, which met 29 children to gather their views on the education, training and employment services they had received while working with the YOT. Key findings and some of their observations have been included in the report.

In order to compare results with our inspection areas, and to provide background information, a national YOT survey (68 per cent response rate – see Annexe 3) was undertaken. This elicited the following:

1. percentage of children on the current caseload with an education, health and care plan (in England) or Individual Development Plan (in Wales)
2. percentage of school-aged children on the current caseload who have special educational needs (in England) or additional learning needs (in Wales).
3. percentage of school-aged children on the current caseload attending a PRU or receiving AP
4. percentage of school-aged children not in any school/PRU
5. percentage of children over school leaving age not in education, training or employment.

Annexe 2: Expert Reference Group

An expert reference group contributed to this report by advising on strategic, technical and operational issues associated with the subject and service under inspection. The group represented stakeholder perspectives and commented on emerging findings and final recommendations.

Group membership included:

Dr. Nina Maxwell CPsychol - Senior Research Fellow, Cardiff University

Dr Phil Smith - Research Associate, Cardiff University

Dunston Patterson - Joint Head of Innovation and Engagement, Youth Justice Board

Dr Adele Ward - Sheffield Halam University/ Probation Service Yorkshire and the Humber

Andy Peaden – The Skill Mill Ltd

Professor Rachel Condry - University of Oxford, Director of Graduate Studies

Marius Frank - Achievement For All

Lee Owston - HMI, Deputy Director | Cross Remit Education, Ofsted

Jackie Gapper - Assistant Director, Estyn

Annexe 3: HM Inspectorate of Probation National YOT survey – 2021

Youth offending services: education, training and employment

Survey responses – caseload percentages

Response rate

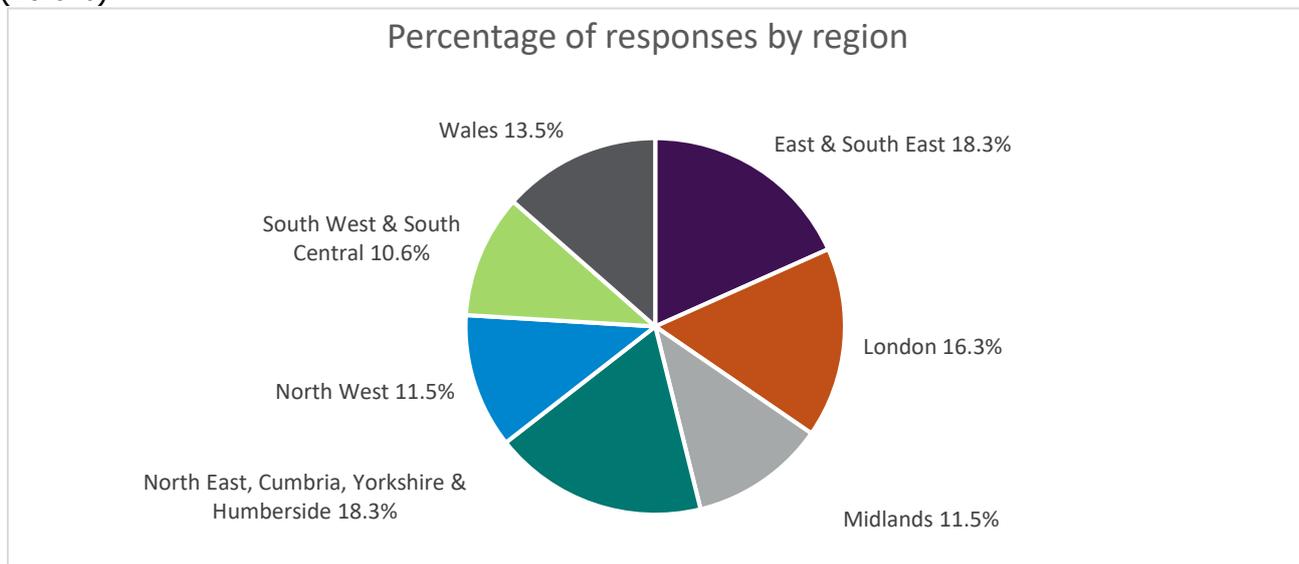
A total of 104 responses were received out of 154 youth offending teams (YOTs)/youth offending services (YOSs) which were contacted. This gave us a 68 per cent response rate.

Responses by region

Responses were received from all seven regions. The table below shows the response rates by region. The highest response rate was from Wales, where 82.4 per cent (14 out of 17) of YOTs/YOSs in the region responded to the survey. The lowest response rate was from London, where just over half of the YOTs/YOSs (54.8 per cent; 17 out of 31) responded.

Region	Number of YOTs/YOSs in the region	Number of YOTs/YOSs which responded to survey	Response rate for region
East & South East	25	19	76.0%
London	31	17	54.8%
Midlands	19	12	63.2%
North East, Cumbria, Yorkshire and Humberside	27	19	70.4%
North West	18	12	66.7%
South West	17	11	64.7%
Wales	17	14	82.4%

The pie chart below shows the make-up of the overall sample of responses. Responses from North East, Cumbria, and Yorkshire and Humberside make up the largest portion (18.3% of all responses), while South West and South Central make up the lowest portion of all responses (10.6%).



Percentages of current caseloads

For the following five questions, areas were asked to select the range within which the percentage of children on their current caseload fell for the following criteria:

1. those with an education, health and care plan (EHCP; in England) or an individual development plan (IDP; in Wales)
2. those who have special educational needs (SEN; in England) or additional learning needs (ALN; in Wales)
3. those of school age attending a pupil referral unit (PRU) or receiving alternative provision (AP)
4. those of school age not in school/PRU/AP
5. those over school leaving age and not in education, employment or training (NEET).

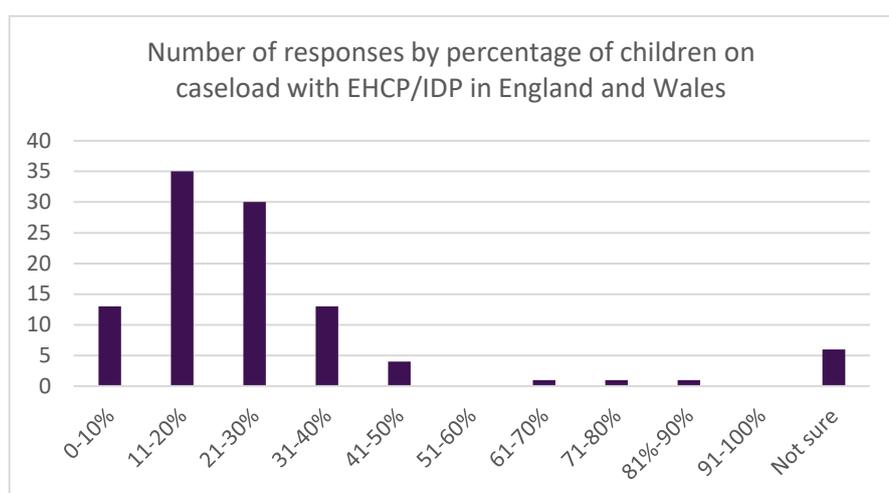
They were given the following options from which to select: 0–10 per cent; 11–20 per cent; 21–30 per cent; 31–40 per cent; 41–50 per cent; 51–60 per cent; 61–70 per cent; 71–80 per cent; 81–90 per cent; 91–100 per cent; and Not sure.

The charts below show the number of areas that responded with a certain percentage range. For example, taking the chart for question one below, in relation to the percentage of children on the current caseload with an EHCP/IDP, 13 areas stated that this percentage fell between 0–10 per cent, 35 stated that this was between 11–20 per cent, and so on.

For accuracy, the table at the side also indicates the number of responses, in the column marked 'n' (number). This number is the same as that indicated by the bar on the chart for each given percentage range.

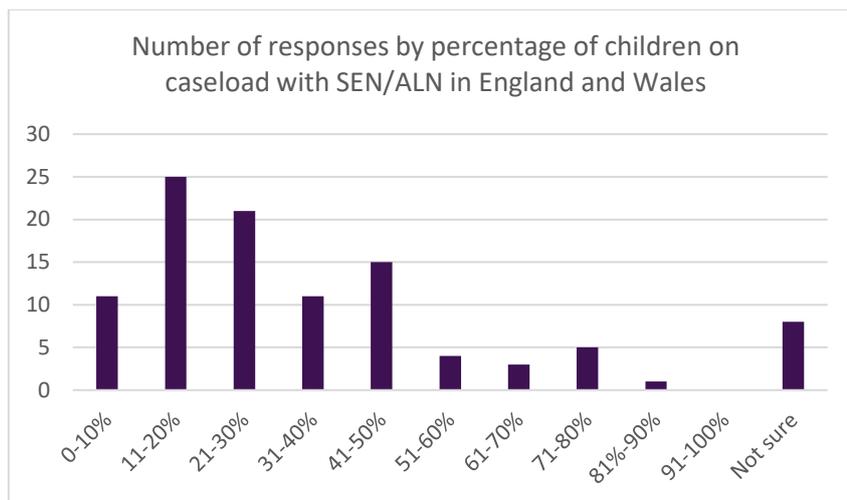
The final column in the table, %, indicates the percentage of all responses which fell within this range. So, it can be seen for question one below that the majority (33.7 per cent) of areas that responded to the survey said that the number of children with an EHCP/IDP was between 11–20 per cent of the current caseload.

1. Percentage of children on current caseload with an education, health and care plan (EHCP; in England) or an individual development plan (IDP; in Wales)



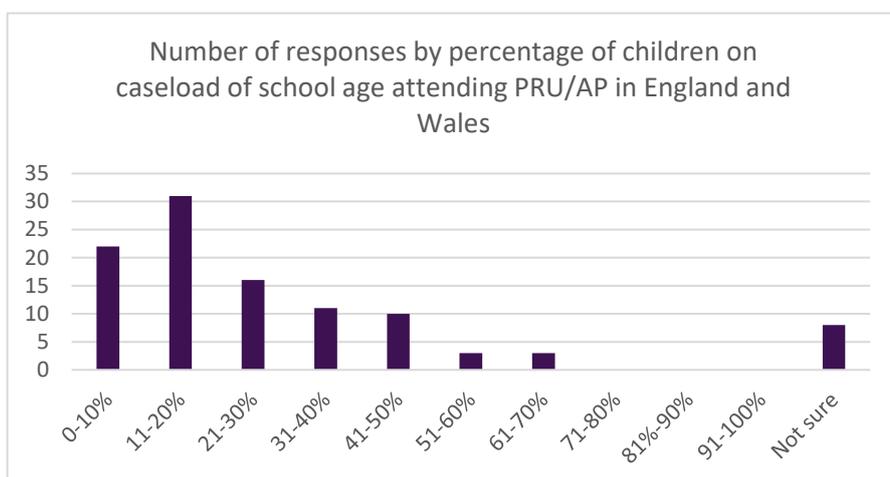
Percentage	n	%
0–10%	13	12.5%
11–20%	35	33.7%
21–30%	30	28.8%
31–40%	13	12.5%
41–50%	4	3.8%
51–60%	0	0.0%
61–70%	1	1.0%
71–80%	1	1.0%
81–90%	1	1.0%
91–100%	0	0.0%
Not sure	6	5.8%
Total	104	100.0%

2. Percentage of children on current caseload who have special educational needs (SEN; in England) or additional learning needs (ALN; in Wales)



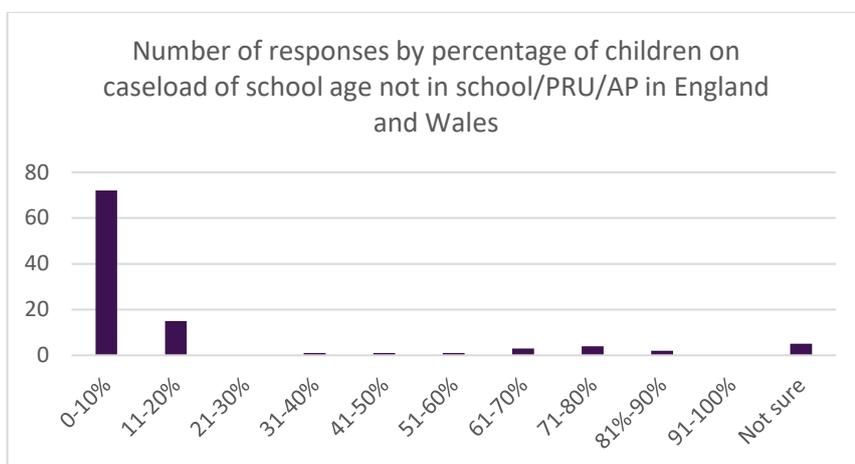
Percentage	n	%
0-10%	11	10.6%
11-20%	25	24.0%
21-30%	21	20.2%
31-40%	11	10.6%
41-50%	15	14.4%
51-60%	4	3.8%
61-70%	3	2.9%
71-80%	5	4.8%
81-90%	1	1.0%
91-100%	0	0.0%
Not sure	8	7.7%
Total	104	100.0%

3. Percentage of children on current caseload of school age attending a pupil referral unit (PRU) or receiving alternative provision (AP)



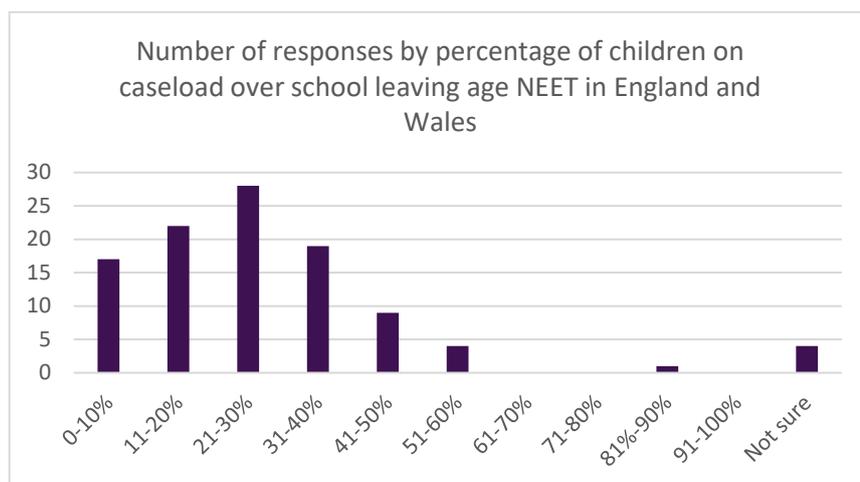
Percentage	n	%
0-10%	22	21.2%
11-20%	31	29.8%
21-30%	16	15.4%
31-40%	11	10.6%
41-50%	10	9.6%
51-60%	3	2.9%
61-70%	3	2.9%
71-80%	0	0.0%
81-90%	0	0.0%
91-100%	0	0.0%
Not sure	8	7.7%
Total	104	100.0%

4. Percentage of children on current caseload of school age not in school/PRU/AP



Percentage	n	%
0-10%	72	69.2%
11-20%	15	14.4%
21-30%	0	0.0%
31-40%	1	1.0%
41-50%	1	1.0%
51-60%	1	1.0%
61-70%	3	2.9%
71-80%	4	3.8%
81-90%	2	1.9%
91-100%	0	0.0%
Not sure	5	4.8%
Total	104	100.0%

5. Percentage of children on current caseload over school leaving age and not in education, employment or training (NEET)



Percentage	n	%
0-10%	17	16.3%
11-20%	22	21.2%
21-30%	28	26.9%
31-40%	19	18.3%
41-50%	9	8.7%
51-60%	4	3.8%
61-70%	0	0.0%
71-80%	0	0.0%
81-90%	1	1.0%
91-100%	0	0.0%
Not sure	4	3.8%
Total	104	100.0%

Annexe 4: Case management data with splits

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