



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of youth offending services in

Gateshead

HM Inspectorate of Probation, May 2023



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The role of HM Inspectorate of Probation

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Please note that throughout the report the names in the practice examples have been changed to protect the individual's identity.

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Foreword

This inspection is part of our programme of youth justice service (YJS) inspections. We have inspected and rated Gateshead YJS across three broad areas: the arrangements for organisational delivery of the service, the quality of work done with children sentenced by the courts, and the quality of out-of-court disposal work.

Overall, Gateshead YJS was rated as 'Good'. We also inspected the quality of resettlement policy and provision, which was separately rated as 'Requires improvement'.

The YJS has a stable, motivated, and experienced staff team, who are committed to achieving the best outcomes for children and families. Managers and senior leaders within the service are visible and accessible, and provide quality support to staff. There is a strong connection between the board and wider service, and practitioners feel heard and valued.

The partnership is invested in and advocates for the YJS. We saw effective collaboration between the YJS and the police, children's social care, and the probation service. Where gaps in health and education provision have been identified, partners are working to resolve these. However, further development of the processes for scrutinising and evaluating data would assist the YJS in shaping and influencing service delivery to the children on its caseload.

The partnership has a clear and proactive response to cared-for children. Systems are in place to divert them from the justice system, where appropriate, and offer wraparound support. However, the partnership needs to focus more on black, Asian and minority ethnic children to further understand their experiences and whether provision is sufficiently meeting their needs. The service needs to improve its response to diversity across all protected characteristics, to ensure that staff understand and embed this in its strategic and operational approach to meeting the needs of children, families, and victims. Training and development are needed to help staff recognise and meet the protected characteristics of all those they work with.

The YJS values the views of children, families and victims who access the service. It has been proactive in seeking regular feedback and using this to shape delivery. This includes consulting on the YJS plan and inviting children and parents to attend board meetings.

Implementation and delivery of work in out-of-court and post-court cases was impressive. Practitioners were skilled at developing relationships with children and families. Cohesive and coordinated partnership working supported staff in managing risk and safety effectively. However, further work is needed to ensure children have quicker access to specialist support for mental health and speech, language, and communication needs.



Justin Russell

HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Gateshead Youth Justice Service
Fieldwork started February 2023

Score 26/36

Overall rating

Good



1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Governance and leadership

Good



1.2 Staff

Good



1.3 Partnerships and services

Requires improvement



1.4 Information and facilities

Good



2. Court disposals

2.1 Assessment

Good



2.2 Planning

Good



2.3 Implementation and delivery

Outstanding



2.4 Reviewing

Outstanding



3. Out-of-court disposals

3.1 Assessment

Good



3.2 Planning

Good



3.3 Implementation and delivery

Outstanding



3.4 Out-of-court disposal policy and provision

Good



4. Resettlement¹

4.1 Resettlement policy and provision

Requires improvement



¹ The rating for resettlement does not influence the overall YJS rating.

Recommendations

As a result of our inspection findings, we have made seven recommendations that we believe, if implemented, will have a positive impact on the quality of youth justice services in Gateshead. This will improve the lives of the children in contact with the youth justice services, and better protect the public.

The Gateshead Youth Justice Service should:

1. further develop data analysis processes to proactively explore and scrutinise trends in data. Findings should be used to shape service delivery
2. develop processes to enable systematic evaluation of service delivery to provide an evidence base and clear understanding of the impact of provision
3. review resettlement policy and provision to ensure that provision and practice consistently meets children's needs.

The management board should:

4. work with the YJS to further develop its diversity strategy and capture this in guidance and processes. The management board should also support the YJS in embedding its strategy and ensure that managers and practitioners are trained and supported to deliver it
5. continue to work with the partnership to ensure that children have quick access to specialist mental health provision
6. ensure that the pathway to speech, language and communication provision is fully embedded, allowing quick access for YJS children
7. continue to work with the YJS and its partners to further develop their response to ensuring all children have access to appropriate education, training, and employment (ETE) provision. This should include improving data analysis and escalation routes to assist effective challenge when there are concerns about ETE provision.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Gateshead YJS over a period of a week, beginning on 27 February 2023. We inspected cases where the sentence or licence, out-of-court disposal, or resettlement case was delivered between 28 February 2022 and 23 December 2022. We also conducted 12 interviews with practitioners and managers.

The metropolitan borough of Gateshead is in the northeast of England in the county of Tyne and Wear. Covering an area of 55 square miles, it is situated on the River Tyne's south bank, opposite Newcastle upon Tyne. The borough also borders County Durham, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland. The Office for National Statistics recorded the total population as 196,154 in 2021. Children aged 10 to 17 years represent nine per cent of this figure. This is slightly lower than the figure for England and Wales, which sits at 10 per cent. Gateshead has one of the largest Jewish communities in the UK. Only four per cent of children aged 10 to 17 years are from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, a slight increase since the 2011 census, when the figure was three per cent. At the time of the inspection, children from these backgrounds were over-represented in the caseload, making up 11 per cent of the total. Gateshead has relatively high levels of deprivation and was ranked the forty-seventh most deprived local authority in England in 2019.

The YJS sits within specialist support in the Children's Services and Life-Long Learning directorate. The service structure includes a team manager, assistant team manager and recently vacated senior youth justice worker post. The wider team consists of youth justice case workers, youth justice advocates and a restorative justice practitioner, as well as seconded colleagues from the police and probation service. The area is one of six youth justice services covered by Northumbria Police.

We last inspected Gateshead YJS in 2016 as part of the short quality screening framework. At the time this year's inspection was announced, nine children were subject to court disposals, including community and custodial sentences. There were 18 children working with the YJS on an out-of-court disposal, including youth conditional cautions, youth cautions and Outcome 22. Youth Justice annual statistics for 2021/2022 recorded that 88 per cent of the children the YJS worked with were male and 65 per cent were aged 15 to 17 years.

Cared-for children represented nine per cent of the caseload; 17 per cent were open on a child in need plan, and no children were subject to child protection plans. The partnership takes a tailored approach to supporting cared-for children and those working with children's social care. Eighty-eight per cent of children in the YJS caseload were experiencing emotional wellbeing and mental health difficulties, and those with substance misuse issues made up 58 per cent of the caseload.

The most common offences are violence against the person. These made up 38 per cent of the inspection case sample. Serious youth violence has not been a significant issue in Gateshead, and partnership organisations are working together to explore emerging concerns. The YJS has good links with the Northumbria violence reduction unit and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. Both have commissioned services that YJS children can access and benefit from.

Domain one: Organisational delivery

To inspect organisational delivery, we reviewed written evidence submitted in advance by the YJS and conducted 14 meetings, including with staff, volunteers, managers, board members, and partnership staff and their managers. Key findings about organisational delivery were as follows.

1.1. Governance and leadership



The governance and leadership of the YOT supports and promotes the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children.

Good

Strengths

- The vision and strategy have been developed in collaboration with partners and the YJS. These advocate for a child-centred and holistic approach, which is reflected throughout the partnership. Priorities are understood and embedded.
- There is a thorough induction and continued development for board members, who understand their role and responsibilities well. There is representation of appropriate seniority from all partners.
- Board members are invested in and advocate for the YJS. There is a mature partnership who support the service and understand risks to provision. Relationships are strong which has enabled effective strategic and operational delivery, including providing seconded staff from police and probation
- The board and YJS have strategic links with other boards, which helps to ensure their work is relevant, consistent and of high quality.
- There are effective relationships between the management board and the wider service. Staff are invited to and attend the board regularly; they feel that their views are heard and responded to. They have a good understanding of the board's activity.
- The management team and senior leadership are visible. Staff understand lines of accountability and feel strong support is offered to them.
- The partnership has recognised that there are gaps in the provision for mental health and speech, language and communication needs. Collaborative work with health and children's social care is underway to give children access to psychologists and speech and language therapists. Through partnership support and advocacy, YJS children now have quick access to counselling.

Areas for improvement:

- At the time of the inspection, the pathways for speech and language therapy and access to specialist mental health provision were not easily accessible. This meant that the services were not reaching all children with these needs. New pathways have now been established, but the partnership needs to continue work to embed these quickly.
- The YJS provides detailed analysis that supports the board's awareness of the profile of children. However, more in-depth, routine analysis and data from partners are needed to provide context and help the board to better understand education provision and current access to specialist health services.

1.2. Staff



Staff within the YOT are empowered to deliver a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children.

Good

Strengths:

- Children are allocated to practitioners with the appropriate skills and experience. The process also considers the practitioner's capacity, ensuring that their workload is manageable.
- The workforce is stable, and staff are confident, experienced, and knowledgeable. Both staff turnover and individual sick leave are low, enabling effective resourcing.
- The induction process prepares new staff and volunteers to undertake their roles well. There is a comprehensive training offer which provides ongoing learning and development opportunities for all staff.
- The YJS invests in its staff and promotes a culture of learning and development. It supports this through a robust appraisal process, and has provided staff access to formal qualifications, internal progression, and opportunities for specialist roles.
- Volunteers feel valued and part of the service, they are motivated to undertake their roles effectively. Their skills are used well, they provide a community voice on the management board and attend referral order and out-of-court disposal panels.
- There is a genuine commitment from all staff to achieve the best outcomes for children, families, and victims. Staff are motivated and passionate; they report that their hard work and achievements are acknowledged by their service leads.
- Supervision arrangements enable managers to provide frequent and supportive oversight of practitioners' work. This has promoted quality in the work with children and families. In the cases we reviewed, management oversight was sufficient in all cases in domain two and the majority of cases in domain three.
- Managers are proactive in engaging with staff. They provide regular opportunities to meet as a service, but also safe environments to give feedback.

Areas for improvement:

- These relate to diversity and are detailed in the diversity section of the report.

1.3. Partnerships and services



A comprehensive range of high-quality services is in place, enabling personalised and responsive provision for all children.

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- Data analysis has given the YJS and its partners an insight into the profile of the children, families and victims who access the service. This has helped them to understand the YJS's performance.
- Victims are offered a bespoke restorative service; their views are valued. The YJS contacts all victims, and there is high uptake of its service.
- Prevention is a priority. The partnership has invested in provision to reach children before formal contact with the justice system, and ensures there is adequate ongoing support for those who have completed work with the YJS.
- Children have access to a range of services through in-house or partnership arrangements. This has enabled the YJS to deliver effective and individually tailored interventions.
- Children who need alcohol and substance misuse interventions have priority access; support is bespoke to meet their needs.
- Risk management is viewed as a partnership responsibility. Processes are robust and there is a collaborative approach to promoting safety.
- There is a proactive approach to addressing exploitation, children at risk receive wraparound support. Complexities of exploitation are understood.
- The YJS has worked with partners to improve services to address emotional wellbeing. Northeast Counselling is now available for children and families. There is also good access to universal provision.
- There are effective transition arrangements, which support children moving into the probation service.
- There is a strong relationship with children's social care, which enables staff to take a coordinated and collaborative approach to addressing children's needs.

Areas for improvement:

- The YJS is working proactively to develop the partnership's response to ensuring education, training, and employment provision meets the needs of children. However, at the time of the inspection we found that escalation routes to raise concerns when provision was not adequate were not always having an impact. The YJS needs to monitor this routinely and provide context about the children's experiences.
- Children who need specialist mental health provision did not have quick or priority access. Although the partnership is developing pathways, current waiting lists are excessive.
- The YJS is developing reparation provision, but further work is needed to ensure that all projects are meaningful, structured, and give children opportunities to learn and develop skills.
- The pathway for access to speech, language and communication therapy is being developed. However, further work is needed to ensure that this is embedded and that YJS children have quick access to support.

1.4. Information and facilities



Timely and relevant information is available and appropriate facilities are in place to support a high-quality, personalised and responsive approach for all children.

Good

Strengths:

- Children and families are seen in accessible, convenient, and safe environments. The YJS has access to a central office and community facilities. Staff also use home visits to support their engagement with children.
- Staff know how to access services from partners and their roles and responsibilities within the partnership. There are information-sharing agreements with all key partners, and communication between services is proactive and effective.
- ICT systems enable staff to carry out their roles and deliver quality services. They have access to ICT equipment that allows them to work both in the office and remotely.
- The YJS has worked with the partnership to learn from serious case reviews and from cases where the best outcomes have not been achieved.
- The YJS is further developing its processes to include auditing by board members. Current quality assurance systems have driven service improvement.
- The YJS is dedicated to learning to drive service improvement. It has strong links with neighbouring services, and staff attend forums to share practice.

Areas for improvement:

- Policies and guidance provide basic details about the YJS's work but do not fully reflect the strength of the work delivered in practice. Staff understand processes, but some policies need more detail to promote consistency and more clearly set out expectations.
- The YJS need to develop a robust evaluation framework to enable routine scrutiny of practice and provision. This will assist in understanding impact, providing an evidence base to shape service delivery.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

Understanding the experiences of children, families and victims is a priority for the YJS. It is proactive in ensuring that their voices are continually heard at the board and used to influence service delivery. This ethos is shared by the wider partnership, which also recognises the importance of working and collaborating with children and families. The partnership has supported the YJS in prioritising this area of work and setting out how it intends to develop it further. Children and their parents or carers have attended the management board, and work is underway to have standing representation at each meeting. The YJS seeks the views of children, their parents or carers, and victims, and uses this feedback to understand their experiences and shape service provision. This includes consulting with children and their parents or carers in developing the YJS plan and creating a child-friendly version to explain their intentions and priorities.

Partners supported the YJS in creating an animated video documenting children's experiences of working with the service. The piece was co-produced with children and has given them the opportunity to tell their story safely. The YJS intends to use the video for wider learning and to support tailoring services to meet children's needs.

During the inspection we spoke to three children and three parents. We also had three responses to our text survey. Both the children and parents felt that the practitioners were flexible and accommodating with appointments and these were held in easily accessible and safe environments. All participants we spoke to felt that the practitioners they worked with had the right skills to support and help them.

In the text survey, a participant said:

"Our youth justice worker has been phenomenal. Everyone has been so supportive and informative."

Practitioners had developed effective working relationships with the children. One participant described how their case manager had gone *"above and beyond"* in their duties to help them. One participant commented:

"My worker was passionate and genuinely wants me to succeed. I am now working in a placement that I love".

In this case, the practitioner had supported the child to find a work placement and the YJS had paid for his work clothes and materials. This was very important to the child, as he felt it helped him integrate and feel part of a mainstream provision.

In the text survey, participants were asked to rate the YJS on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being poor and 10 fantastic. All rated the YJS as 10, unanimously describing their experiences as positive and impactful. One participant commented:

"The support I received was incredible. Her kind and caring personality really helped me understand and get through the experience"

Diversity

- The service needs to improve the way it meets all protected characteristics, to promote consistency and accountability. Its strategic approach to addressing the diversity of children, families and victims was not sufficiently clear, and this is impacting on delivery.
- To help the YJS to embed a strategic and operational approach to diversity, policies and procedures need to capture how the service will respond to all protected characteristics. This should also include addressing disproportionality. This will give staff clarity on how to deliver services and will promote improved consistency in practice.
- There needs to be more focus on Black, Asian and minority ethnic children. At the time of the inspection, four children from these heritages were on the caseload, making up 11 per cent of the total. This is disproportionate when compared to the local population for children aged 10-17 years in Gateshead which sits at four per cent. Whilst this figure can fluctuate and is not always high, evidence indicates that instances of over-representation are frequent. While we recognise this figure represents low numbers of children, it is nonetheless disproportionate, and scrutiny of data has not triggered an in-depth analysis to understand this pattern or consider the experiences of these children. The YJS needs this information to inform service delivery and establish whether current practice is meeting all individual children's needs. Additional oversight from the board will support the YJS in monitoring and responding to over-representation.
- The partnership recognises that cared-for children are over-represented in the YJS caseload. Its strategic response promotes appropriate support to meet their needs. This is also understood at an operational level with diversion being appropriately considered to reduce contact with the criminal justice system and wraparound support offered.
- To ensure that the workforce reflects the local population and the YJS caseload, future recruitment should encourage applicants from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. At the time of the inspection, there were no staff from these backgrounds.
- Volunteers and staff feel that their diversity needs have been recognised and considered and, where required, adjustments have been made.
- Further training is required to help staff to recognise and respond to the diversity needs of children and families. It is essential that diversity is fully understood and that practitioners have the skills and continued support to translate this understanding into practice.
- Recognition of and responses to diversity needs to be strengthened in all casework including out-of-court disposals, post court and resettlement cases. Greater exploration of religion, sexuality, culture, learning or communication needs will assist in understanding children's lived experience. While there were strong individual examples of diversity needs being met, this needs to be consistent in all cases.

Domain two: Court disposals

We reviewed five community sentences and one custodial sentence.

2.1. Assessment



Assessment is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.

Good

Our rating² for assessment is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance? ³	83%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	100%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	100%

Assessment of desistance was of sufficient quality in the majority of cases. Case managers were proactive in engaging children and families in the assessment process, and their views were considered and included. Assessments were well informed; practitioners had liaised with other services and used this information as part of their analysis. Practitioners were skilled at developing balanced assessments, drawing out strengths and protective factors as well as exploring areas of concern. Recognition and analysis of diversity were inadequate in the majority of cases. We found that assessments had not sufficiently identified or explored religion, sexuality, culture, learning or communication needs. This had an impact on practitioners' understanding of the child's identity and lived experiences, and their assessments of how this might affect future behaviour. As a result, professional discretion was used to downgrade assessment of desistance from 'Outstanding' to 'Good'.

Assessments of safety were impressive and comprehensive. Practitioners had a strong understanding of the complex issues and potential adverse outcomes that can affect children. Risks to the child were clearly articulated, and the nature, context, and imminence of these were sufficiently detailed. Assessment of risks to others was consistently strong. In all cases, risks had been identified and sufficiently scrutinised. External controls and interventions to minimise risk of harm had also been analysed, which helped practitioners to understand the child's future behaviour and imminency of potential risks occurring.

Assessments of risks to and from the child had been bolstered by information from other professionals. This had been used appropriately to explore previous experiences and behaviours. This helped practitioners to understand concerns and potential triggers for future behaviour.

² The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available in the data annexe.](#)

³ Professional discretion was used to downgrade the rating for assessment from Outstanding to Good due to insufficiencies in the assessment of diversity.

2.2. Planning



Planning is well-informed, holistic and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.

Good

Our rating⁴ for planning is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	100%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	67%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	83%

Planning for desistance was proportionate and adequately detailed. Practitioners had asked children and parents or carers for their views, and used these to develop realistic plans of work. Planning focused positively on supporting the child's desistance and further developing their strengths, which included consideration of the child's aspirations and future goals. Appropriate interventions to address concerns had been identified and planned for, including the use of in-house provision and referrals to other services. However, practitioners had not sufficiently taken account of diversity in their assessments, which had an impact on planning. We found that not all of the children's diversity needs had been appropriately considered, including their learning and development needs.

In the main, plans to keep children safe had set out appropriate services to address concerns. Practitioners considered controls and interventions to promote safety, which included developing specific safety plans with children. We saw some good examples of contingency planning, but this was not consistent in all cases. In several cases contingency arrangements were generic rather than tailored to the child and did not clearly set out the action to take should risks increase.

Planning to keep others safe was sufficiently detailed, and recorded the necessary controls and interventions to mitigate risks. These included bespoke interventions for specific risks, such as driving awareness. In all relevant cases, potential and actual victims had been considered, and appropriate mechanisms and arrangements identified to guard against risks and promote the safety of others. Whilst contingency planning to address risks to others was stronger than planning to keep the child safe, the good quality we found in several cases was not reflected in all. Responses to potential changes in risk needed more detail and tailoring to the child.

Where other services were involved with the children, communication had been effective, and planning was a collaborative process. There was a considered approach, whereby existing plans with other services had been aligned and agencies understood their role in promoting safety.

⁴ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available in the data annexe.](#)

2.3. Implementation and delivery



High-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child.

Outstanding

Our rating⁵ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?	100%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?	83%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	100%

In most cases plans had been executed well. Intervention was proportionate and targeted at the child's strengths and areas of concern. In addition, work was undertaken to develop practical and life skills that would assist children beyond the completion of their order. Delivery had promoted access to mainstream and community provision. In cases we reviewed, practitioners had developed and maintained strong working relationships with the children, parents and carers. Their proactive approach had facilitated effective compliance and, in all cases, enforcement action was not needed. Where required, practitioners adjusted appointment times and locations, which encouraged children to engage with the disposals. Though not sufficient in all cases, the work that was delivered to meet children's diversity needs was stronger. Practitioners tailored delivery to individual children, ensuring that the work was accessible and carried out at a manageable pace for children and their parents or carers.

There was a robust partnership response to managing risks, communication was strong and proactive. We saw good coordination and a collaborative approach within the professional network to promote safety.

There was good communication between the practitioner, child, and parent or carer. This supported monitoring and allowed the practitioner to respond quickly when risks to the child changed. Where required, practitioners made appropriate referrals to other services, such as substance misuse and counselling. In some cases, inspectors assessed that children would have benefited from specialist provision for mental health and speech, language and communication needs. It was evident that practitioners were making every effort to meet these needs, but quicker access to this specialist provision is needed.

Delivery of interventions to keep others safe was impressive. In all cases where there were potential and actual victims, effective mechanisms were in place to safeguard individuals. Interventions had targeted critical areas and had been tailored to the specific concern, enabling sessions to be impactful.

⁵ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available in the data annexe.](#)

2.4. Reviewing



Reviewing of progress is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.

Outstanding

Our rating⁶ for reviewing is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	100%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	83%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	100%

Reviewing activity was proactive and frequent. In all cases changes to desistance, and risks to and from the child, were captured in formal written reviews. Children and their parents or carers were meaningfully involved in reviewing, and their views were sought and used to explore progress. Practitioners were responsive to changes; they considered the children's strengths and areas of concerns to review progress. Where required, they made necessary adjustments to the plan of work to ensure that interventions were meeting needs.

Information-sharing across the professional network was a strength in managing both risk and safety. Throughout the disposal period, communication was proactive and frequent. This supported practitioners in monitoring concerns, and enabled them to respond quickly to changes in risks. Other services also contributed to reviewing; professionals shared their opinions on progress and, if necessary, appropriately adjusted their own offers of intervention. Children and parents or carers were seen as integral to managing risk and safety. They were consulted specifically on potential risks to safety and harm. This not only helped practitioners to understand the child's perception, but also promoted a collaborative approach to reviewing concerns.

In most cases, the focus on keeping the child safe was maintained throughout the disposal. We saw evidence of practitioners responding quickly to changes, but also acknowledging when risks to the child had decreased.

Risk management processes were robust and enabled practitioners to review concerns frequently. Multi-agency forums were used well, and effective management oversight supported practitioners in reviewing and responding to complex cases.

⁶ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available in the data annexe.](#)

Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

We inspected nine cases managed by the YJS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of two youth conditional cautions, one youth caution, and six community resolutions and Outcome 22s. We interviewed the practitioner or relevant manager in all nine cases.

3.1. Assessment



Assessment is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.

Good

Our rating⁷ for assessment is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	67%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	78%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	67%

Practitioners took a balanced approach to assessment, whereby they considered both strengths and areas of concern. However, in some cases their analysis needed to be more detailed, ensuring that all elements of desistance were identified and explored. In all cases, children and their parents or carers were meaningfully involved, and their views were acknowledged and incorporated into the assessment. There were strong individual examples of diversity being considered, but this was not consistent in all cases. Practitioners needed to be better at recognising diversity and analysing the impact on children and families' needs. In almost all cases, where required, assessment had explored the wishes and needs of victims. This was facilitated by the restorative justice practitioner, who was able to share the victims' experiences quickly to inform assessments.

Case managers were proactive in seeking information from other services to support their assessments of desistance and risks to and from the child. They considered this information appropriately and used their professional judgement to analyse impact.

Practitioners demonstrated a strong understanding of early childhood experiences and how these can affect presenting behaviours and risks to the child. Potential adverse outcomes, the nature of these and the contexts in which they could occur were adequately explored. Practitioners identified risks to others, and their rationales were sufficiently detailed to support classifications. However, analysis could be enhanced further by more detail about individual risks and the circumstances in which they might occur.

⁷ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available in the data annexe.](#)

3.2. Planning



Planning is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.

Good

Our rating⁸ for planning is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus on supporting the child's desistance?	100%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	67%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	89%

Planning to address desistance was consistently impressive. Practitioners had tailored plans to the children and considered their maturity and personal circumstances, ensuring that targets were realistic. We saw strong examples of the child's learning needs and information from education, health and care plans being used to inform planning and consider reasonable adjustments. Plans recognised areas of need, as well as focusing on building strengths. Appropriate interventions were identified to address desistance; these included promoting and supporting access to community and mainstream services. Children and their parents or carers were meaningfully involved in creating plans, and it was clear that their views were appropriately prioritised.

In planning to address the risk of harm to and safety of the child, there was strong coordination with other services. Where required, we found that the YJS plans had been aligned with those of other services to promote safety. There was a strong presence from police, children's social care and early help, with planning being a collaborative process. Appropriate interventions to address emerging concerns were identified, and practitioners clearly articulated the work that was required to mitigate concerns. However, these strengths were not reflected in all cases in planning to keep the child safe. To achieve consistency, the YJS needs to ensure that all identified risks are adequately addressed.

Restorative justice was a key feature in all relevant cases, and victims' wishes were considered and factored into plans. Practitioners had paid sufficient attention to all actual and potential victims, and had identified appropriate mechanisms such as external controls to promote safety.

Contingency planning to keep others safe was more effective than planning to keep the child safe. However, practitioners had recently completed contingency training, and we found that this had improved the quality of plans. Where contingency planning was sufficient, we found that arrangements were comprehensive and tailored, and highlighted the action to take should risks change. This included specific detail on the role of other services in responding to increases in risks.

⁸ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available in the data annexe.](#)

3.3. Implementation and delivery



High-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child.

Outstanding

Our rating⁹ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does service delivery effectively support the child's desistance?	89%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?	89%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	89%

Practitioners are skilled at developing and maintaining effective relationships with children and families. There is a genuine care and commitment, with practitioners clearly advocating for the children and families they work with. They were flexible about when and how they saw children, which encouraged engagement. They considered diversity in most cases, and responded to children's learning and development needs. Plans were well executed, with interventions sequenced and delivered at an appropriate pace for the child. As well as addressing areas of concerns, practitioners focused on building on children's existing strengths and promoting integration with community and mainstream provision.

There was strong communication between the professional network and a shared responsibility for keeping the child and other people safe. Partnership responses to risks were coordinated and tailored to the child. In the cases we reviewed, practitioners worked jointly with other services, synchronising appointments and interventions so that the children and parents or carers were not overwhelmed.

Practitioners understood the impact of trauma and had factored this into their approach to working with the children. They were confident in knowing how and when to start intervention work and if they were best placed to do this. However, although we saw tenacious efforts from practitioners to support children with highly complex needs, there needed to be quicker access to specialist services.

Appropriate bespoke interventions were completed to address concerns, including conflict resolution, victim-focused work, lifestyles, and healthy relationships. This had helped children to understand their own behaviour and its impact on others. In the majority of required cases, practitioners had planned interventions that considered all potential and actual victims. This included specific work with the child but also external controls to mitigate and monitor risks.

⁹ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available in the data annexe.](#)

3.4. Out-of-court disposal policy and provision



There is a high-quality, evidence-based out-of-court disposal service in place that promotes diversion and supports sustainable desistance.

Good

We also inspected the quality of policy and provision in place for out-of-court disposals, using evidence from documents, meetings and interviews. Our key findings were as follows:

Strengths:

- Guidance clearly sets out a joint protocol with the police. There is sufficient detail to explain the eligibility criteria and the different disposals available.
- The YJS and police are committed to diverting children. There are robust processes to promote consistency and ensure eligible children are considered for out-of-court disposals. This includes those who have made 'no comment' in police interviews.
- The police do not issue out-of-court disposals as a single agency, which allows the YJS and police to have joint oversight of all cases. This has enabled YJS practitioners to take a collaborative approach.
- The process is thorough. Comprehensive assessments are undertaken, which meaningfully involve children and their parents or carers to inform decision-making.
- The restorative justice practitioner is a standing panel member. Uptake and consent rates for victims are high, which allow their experiences and voices are heard.
- A multi-agency panel supports the decision-making process. This is well attended, with other agencies contributing effectively. However, the YJS and police have maintained responsibility for the joint decision.
- There is a clear escalation process in place should a decision not be reached; this allows cases to be reviewed at a senior level. Although it is not often needed, panel members are confident in using this process.
- Outcome 22 is an embedded disposal option. It diverts the child from the criminal justice system without receiving a formal sanction, and enables the YJS to provide diversion work and other services.
- Intervention is offered for all disposals and children can access the same services and provision as post-court cases.

Areas for improvement:

- The YJS needs to develop robust evaluation processes to fully review its provision. Routine evaluation of out-of-court disposals will provide an evidence base and help the service to understand the impact of outcomes. It is essential that performance data is used to identify areas requiring additional scrutiny.

4.1. Resettlement

4.1. Resettlement policy and provision



There is a high-quality, evidence-based resettlement service for children leaving custody.

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- Resettlement guidance is in place and there are plans to review it regularly.
- The importance of sustaining relationships is understood. Practitioners were skilled at developing meaningful relationships with the children and their parents or carers. We found proactive efforts to maintain contact with children in custody and provide support for families who were visiting.
- Hearing the child's voice while they are in custody is a priority. Safeguarding interviews are routinely completed with children, allowing them to discuss their experiences.
- Resettlement training has been completed; practitioners feel that this has adequately prepared them for working with custodial cases.
- Communication between the YJS and the secure estate was effective. This ensured that information relating to risks to and from the child were shared, promoting safety. In both cases we reviewed, risks to others were sufficiently managed.
- In a case we reviewed, the YJS and children's social care worked collaboratively to ensure that the child could return to his preferred placement.
- Children's health care needs were met in custody. In one case, work had ensured that counselling was available for the child on release.

Areas for improvement:

- The policy does provide fundamental information, but further work is needed to clearly articulate how to meet all resettlement needs in practice. In the cases we reviewed, we found that some essential work to prepare the children for release had not been undertaken.
- To promote consistency, guidance needs to capture the roles and responsibilities of the partnership and how services will work collaboratively to address resettlement.
- There were examples of effective resettlement work in the cases we reviewed. However, this was not consistent for education, training and employment and for accommodation. We found that work to meet some of these needs had not been adequately planned for and carried out.
- In one case, to promote safety there needed to be a stronger multi-agency response to potential extra familial harm.
- Evaluation and review of resettlement provision is needed to understand if the partnership response to children in custody is meeting their needs. Routine analysis will provide evidence to shape and inform future service delivery.

Further information

The following can be found on our website:

- [inspection data, including methodology and contextual facts about the YJS](#)
- [a glossary of terms used in this report.](#)