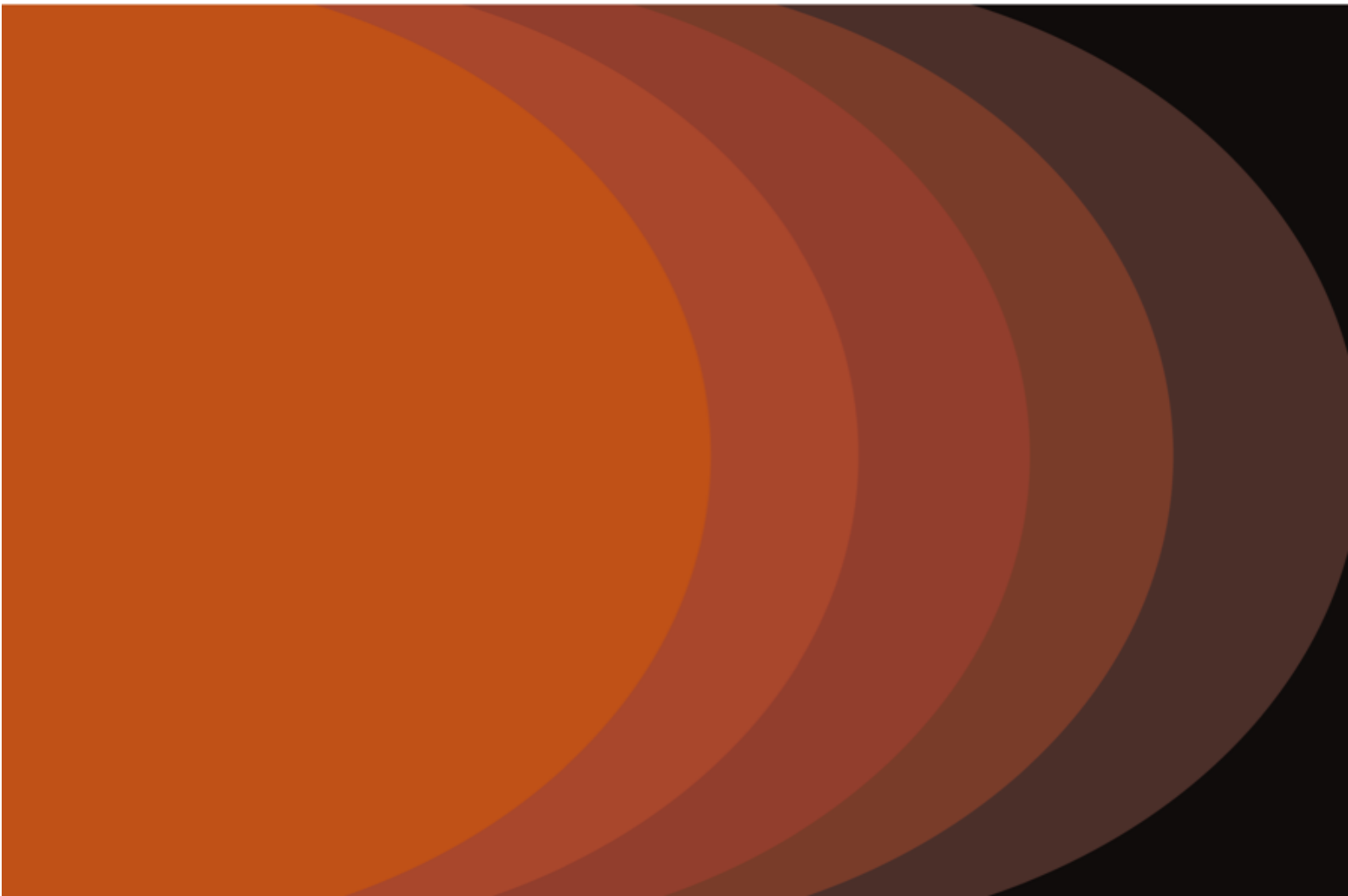




HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of youth offending services in
Ealing YJS

HM Inspectorate of Probation, September 2023



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HM Inspectorate of Probation is the independent inspector of youth offending and probation services in England and Wales. We report on the effectiveness of probation and youth offending service work with adults and children.

We inspect these services and publish inspection reports. We highlight good and poor practice and use our data and information to encourage high-quality services. We are independent of government and speak independently.

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

The YJS and wider partnership approach to meeting children's education, training, and employment (ETE) needs is impressive. Both the strategic and operational arrangements meant that most children were in appropriate ETE by the end of their work with the YJS and were thriving.

The head of service and staff within the YJS are future-focused and genuinely dedicated to making sure children achieve and exceed their aspirations. Proactive approaches and strong partnership working have given children access to a wide range of services that promote community integration and build on strengths.

Relationships with key strategic partners need significant development to improve service delivery. Police and the Probation Service need to ensure consistent representation at board level and commit to strengthening their strategic contribution and oversight. Provision for out-of-court disposals requires a full review by the YJS and the police to ensure decision making and arrangements consistently and effectively promote diversion. Out-of-court policies and delivery require revision to ensure the voluntary nature of disposals is fully understood by both services and, the children receiving them.

The YJS has been proactive in identifying, understanding, and addressing the disproportionality experienced by black and mixed heritage children. Its strategy is evidence-based and clearly sets out the actions necessary for systemic change. It now needs to ensure this is extended to other over-represented groups, such as cared-for children and those with neurodiverse needs. We found strengths in casework around practitioners' understanding of and responses to children's diversity. Practitioners were delivering impressive work around diversity and ensured that children received equitable access to services. However, the identification and analysis of risks to and from children in out-of-court disposal work required development. Additionally, we found that in post-court cases, service delivery was not consistently promoting the child's safety. A focus upon effective management oversight and embedded quality assurance processes will help the YJS to improve the quality of practice.

The YJS recognises the importance of hearing from children and families who access the service, to understand their lived experiences. Feedback is routinely sought, analysed, and used to shape delivery and it was positive to see that children and families have a voice and influence in Ealing.



Justin Russell
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Ealing Youth Justice Service
Fieldwork started July 2023

Score 17/36

Overall rating

Requires improvement



1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Governance and leadership

Requires improvement



1.2 Staff

Good



1.3 Partnerships and services

Good



1.4 Information and facilities

Good



2. Court disposals

2.1 Assessment

Good



2.2 Planning

Good



2.3 Implementation and delivery

Requires improvement



2.4 Reviewing

Requires improvement



3. Out-of-court disposals

3.1 Assessment

Inadequate



3.2 Planning

Requires improvement



3.3 Implementation and delivery

Good



3.4 Out-of-court disposal policy and provision

Requires improvement



4. Resettlement¹

4.1 Resettlement policy and provision

Good



¹ The rating for Resettlement does not influence the overall YOS rating.

Recommendations

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

The Ealing Youth Justice Service should:

1. develop and embed effective management oversight and quality assurance processes to ensure they add value in improving the following of processes and the quality of case manager practice
2. work with police partners to undertake a fundamental review of out-of-court disposal policies, guidance, and provision
3. improve out-of-court disposal assessments of risks to and from the child, to ensure that all risks are fully understood and adequately analysed
4. build on the current excellent work around addressing disproportionality and extend this to ensure all over-represented groups are adequately covered, including cared-for children and those with neurodiverse needs.

The YJS management board should:

5. increase connectivity with YJS practice by greater awareness, oversight and support of operational delivery.

The Metropolitan Police service should:

6. ensure consistent representation at board level and commit to strengthening their strategic contribution and collaboration with the YJS
7. complete a full review of out-of-court policy and provision in collaboration with the YJS and ensure all out-of-court practice and provision is effective and closely aligned with the YJS child first principles.

The Probation Service should:

8. work with the YJS to develop effective localised policies and pathways to improve service delivery (particularly transitions) and bridge the gap between the services.
9. ensure consistent representation at and contribution to the YJS management board.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Ealing YJS over a period of a week, beginning on 10 July 2023. We inspected cases where the sentence or licence, out-of-court disposal or resettlement provision was delivered between 11 July 2022 and 05 May 2023. We also conducted 28 interviews with case managers.

Ealing is the third largest London borough by population and eleventh largest area. The borough is home to 366,127 people. Children aged 10 to 17 make up 36,718 of the Ealing population. Ealing is richly diverse in terms of its landscape and residents. It is the fourth most ethnically diverse borough in the country; 69 per cent of children aged 10 to 17 are from black, Asian and minority ethnic heritage. At the time of the inspection, these children were over-represented, making up 75 per cent of the YJS caseload. There is a substantial Polish community in Ealing, and the largest Sikh population outside India. There are also high numbers of refugees and asylum seekers.

The YJS is part of Ealing children's services directorate and is within the early help and prevention portfolio. The newly appointed director of children's services is also the chair of the YJS management board. The head of the integrated youth service (IYS) oversees the YJS, and the youth and Connexions services. The YJS restructured in February 2023, increasing its management capacity and realigning areas of responsibility. The strategic management structure comprises the head of service and the YJS service manager. There are four operational managers, who oversee statutory work, referral orders and restorative justice, serious youth violence and victims, and out-of-court disposals and early intervention. The restructure also included the creation of a senior practitioner post. At the time of the inspection the YJS were participating in the piloting of a new out-of-court disposal tool and it is noted the inspection occurred within the context of a period of change and development for the service.

At the time of the inspection, 82 children were subject to community sentences, two were in custody, one child was on licence, and 63 children were working with the YJS on out-of-court disposals. The majority of the caseload were boys aged between 15 and 17. The most common offences were for violence or were drug related. Violent offences accounted for 46 per cent of the caseload in domain two and 40 per cent in domain three. At the time of the inspection, 54 per cent of the caseload were identified as having substance misuse issues. In domain three, 30 per cent of the sample had committed drug-related offences, compared with 0 per cent in domain two. Like many YJSs, a high proportion of children were working with children's social care: 21 per cent were subject to child in need plans, 2 per cent were open on child protection plans and 10 per cent were cared for by the local authority.

Ealing's first-time entrant figures have continued on a downward trend since 2018 and are lower than the average for England and Wales and London. Similarly, Ealing's reoffending rates have also consistently declined and are lower than the average for England and Wales. Ealing experiences low custody rates, and at the time of the inspection, no children had been sentenced to custody over the previous seven months.

The Metropolitan Police covers the borough of Ealing. The YJS has good links with the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), which has supported the YJS in providing services to children.

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.

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.

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- The service vision and priorities have been developed collaboratively with the board and wider service. They are understood and embedded.
- The board knows the profile and demographics of the children, families and victims accessing the service. Most board members provide the YJS with data and analysis from their own services to improve the YJS's knowledge and understanding of issues affecting children.
- Board members receive an induction and ongoing training and support to undertake their role.
- Innovative approaches are consistently used to ensure that children and families have a voice at every board meeting. The importance of their lived experience is recognised and used to influence service delivery.
- The YJS has strong strategic relationships with most partners, and partners are invested in and effectively advocate for the YJS. The links the YJS and board members have developed has raised the profile of the service. The YJS is well respected, and its strategic reach has fostered effective working relationships.
- Secondment arrangements provide in-house services from the police, the substance misuse service, the Connexions service, and a full-time psychologist.
- Arrangements to meet children's education, training, and employment (ETE) needs were impressive. Wraparound support and the partnership's proactive approach ensures that most children are not only in ETE but are thriving.
- The head of service and the YJS are future-focused and understand the risks to service provision. They have been innovative and proactive in securing funding, commissioning services and maximising existing resources to ensure that children's needs are met.
- The YJS has strong links with the third sector. This provides access to additional services to build protective factors and meet children's diversity needs.
- Although there is a strong health offer for children, the partnership is supporting the YJS to enhance this further by providing direct access to

speech, language, and communication therapy. There will soon be a general practitioner based at the YJS office to meet children's health needs.

- The wider service understands the role of the board, and there are mechanisms in place to ensure that the board's activity and service updates are disseminated to staff.

Areas for improvement:

- Police representation at board level has been changeable and not always of the appropriate seniority. Further work is needed to ensure the police are sighted on all strategic and operational activity and to ensure the YJS's vision and priorities are understood at all levels across the force.
- There has been some inconsistency in board member representation across the partnership. Most members are evidently invested, however, board member stability and consistency is needed to adequately support the YJS.
- Although providing funding, the Probation Service has not been able to fulfil its statutory responsibility in seconding a probation officer to the YJS. Links between the services need to be strengthened to improve service delivery, particularly in relation to young people's transition to probation. The existing arrangements have not been effective in bridging the gaps between the two services.
- Strategic relationships between the YJS and children's social care are strong. However, operational roles and responsibilities are not always understood. This has impacted on joint working and the quality of case work.
- Links between the YJS and the board are developing, with managers and some staff attending meetings. However, board members would benefit from more connection to and oversight of operational activity, in particular out-of-court disposals. This will assist the YJS in driving quality in practice

1.2. Staff



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

Good

Strengths:

- The workforce is stable and adequately staffed to meet service need. Effective contingency arrangements are in place should demands change.
- Workloads are reasonable and actively managed. The allocation process appropriately considers capacity, and practitioners felt that there was an even distribution of work.
- The recent restructure has increased management capacity. Staff felt that lines of accountability were now clearer, and this has improved the frequency and quality of support they receive.
- All staff receive monthly supervision, which focuses on staff's wellbeing and health, cases and workload, performance, and training and development.
- Staff have access to both individual and group clinical supervision. This provides case consultation as well as additional support for their wellbeing. Practitioners reported finding this incredibly valuable.
- There is a robust induction process, which supports staff both when they transition to new roles and when they join the service.
- There is a clear appetite for learning and development, and staff have been able to access valuable and impactful training. Staff are encouraged to access the Elevate programme, and two have successfully completed this.
- There have been several internal promotion and development opportunities for staff, including moves into management posts and progression into senior posts in other services.
- Staff are motivated and passionate. They are strong advocates for the children and families they work with and have a genuine commitment to achieving the best outcomes.
- The volunteer offer is developing and expanding to increase the opportunities to work with children and get involved with the YJS. Most volunteers reported they were satisfied with the support and communication they received. However, future development needs to ensure that volunteers have adequate training and oversight for this new role.

Areas for improvement:

- Practitioners felt well supported by managers. However, management oversight was not consistently improving the quality of the case work we reviewed. Where oversight was deemed necessary, this was only sufficient in 6 of the 12 domain two cases, and 11 of 19 domain three cases. Further development is needed to ensure that practitioners are given clear direction when needed.

- Staff are experienced and knowledgeable, but felt that they needed more access to specialist training to support and improve their direct work with children and families.
- Lines of communication between the leadership team and wider service need strengthening. This will provide further opportunities for feedback and ensure that key messages to promote safety, staff development and consistency in practice are heard.

1.3. Partnerships and services



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

Good

Strengths:

- Comprehensive analysis is routinely completed by the YJS, providing the service and partners with a detailed understanding of the profile of the children and families who access the service. Data is effectively scrutinised and used to influence service delivery and target resources.
- Feedback from children and families is routinely gathered and highly valued. The YJS use it to shape service delivery, provisions, and resources.
- All children are offered a health assessment and, where required, have direct access to a forensic clinical psychologist. A general practitioner is due to be located at the YJS to further enhance the health offer.
- In-house substance misuse provision provides quick support and intervention.
- Children can access numerous services to meet their needs and promote community integration. The services are future-focused and aim to build on children's desistance and protective factors. They include Brentford football club, which provides activities and intervention, and numerous mentoring services.
- Strong relationships with the third sector and key partners enable children and families to access a range of services, including support once the YJS has completed their intervention. This facilitates effective exit planning.
- Prevention and early intervention are a priority. The YJS and partnership are committed to providing services to avoid contact with the justice system. This includes enhancing links with, and providing interventions in, primary and secondary schools.
- There is a robust and impressive ETE offer. The partnership's collaborative approach has helped children to secure, maintain, and flourish in ETE. The majority of children are in appropriate ETE when they have finished working with the YJS.
- The partnership has appropriate forums and mechanisms, which supports multi-agency discussions and oversight of risk and safety. However, internal management oversight processes need to be strengthened.
- Wraparound support and services are available for children who have been identified at risk of exploitation.

Areas for improvement:

- Reparation requires further development to ensure that there are a range of restorative community options that provide children with opportunities to learn and develop.
- The YJS is developing its restorative justice offer. This will enable it to work with more victims. Current processes are promising, but the YJS needs to

continue to work and liaise with statutory services, including the Probation service to improve provision.

- Some in-house intervention resources and materials that are used with children need to be improved so that they are child friendly, accessible, and in an appealing format.
- There are current gaps in provision for children who have speech, language, and communication needs. The YJS has recognised this and is in the process of securing direct access to these services.

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:

- Most policies are comprehensive and provide adequate guidance on protocols and practice. These are regularly reviewed.
- Information-sharing agreements and protocols are in place with key partners. This provides the YJS with pathways to share and receive information to support effective case management.
- The YJS facilities are impressive. They are based in a youth centre and co-located with children's social care. The premises are visually appealing, and several rooms have been designed and decorated by the children. They offer confidential spaces for intervention sessions, cooking facilities, an arts room, a music studio and a gym.
- The central location of the facilities provides easy access for children. All children we spoke to as part of the inspection said that they felt safe in this environment.
- The YJS has developed an agreement with a local café, where they fund a meal deal menu for children. The café owner enjoys contributing to supporting young people in the local community.
- ICT packages are effective. Staff are able to work remotely from home and at the YJS premises. They have access to the Core Plus case management system and the Mosaic children's social care system. The systems enable YJS staff to extract data easily and run comprehensive performance reports.
- There is a commitment to improving the quality of service delivery. The YJS proactively seeks learning opportunities and links with other services to further develop and improve the quality of practice.
- The YJS and wider partnership use opportunities to learn from serious case reviews and cases where the best outcomes have not been achieved. Where required, learning has been effectively disseminated.
- Children, families and stakeholders are able to contribute to the evaluation and review of effectiveness of services and provision.

Areas for improvement:

- The frequency of quality assurance activity is appropriate, but this is not consistently identifying gaps in practice or drawing together themes for learning. Processes need to be more robust and in-depth to impact positively and improve the quality of casework.
- The YJS needs to improve the communication of some protocols and check that they are being followed consistently. This will promote understanding and safety.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

There is a genuine commitment from the YJS and wider partnership to hearing from the children and families they work with, to understand their lived experience. The children and families' views are highly valued, routinely sought, and then used effectively to shape service delivery. The YJS and management board recognise the importance of hearing from children and their parents or carers, and consistently use innovative approaches to ensure that they have a voice at every meeting. These include children and families attending meetings in person, or providing their views through video or audio recordings. Children and families decide on how they would like to engage with the board.

Existing mechanisms allow continual feedback from children and families, who can give their opinions on the individual service they have received. In addition, the YJS also conducts themed surveys with children, such as on 'safe spaces', to further understand their experiences. The information gathered is collated and analysed to explore the impact of services and, if needed, adjust the way they are implemented. Children's perspectives are also sought to evaluate provision and resources. The YJS uses their feedback to refine and inform commissioned services. This includes inviting children to review interventions on quarterly basis and make recommendations for improvement, for example on the content and length of sessions. This informed approach has led to recommissioning of services that children felt had helped them.

The YJS contacted, on our behalf, children who had worked with the service, to gain their consent for an interview or a text survey. We met with nine children and four parents. We also had four replies to our text survey.

Almost all children we had contact with report they have had a positive experience with the YJS, and believed their practitioners had the right skills to assist them. One child stated:

"My worker was helpful, she listened and understood me, she allowed me to tell my story and helped me to plan out the things I needed to work on."

All children told us that they had access to the right services to help them achieve positive outcomes. One child stated:

"I got lots of help... I did mentoring, boxing, cooking activities and help with my CV. I found all the activities were very good and helped me a lot to develop discipline and skills."

Parents also agreed that the provision had effectively supported their child. One commented:

"I saw my son grow emotionally and mature and that was through all the work the YJS did."

Most of the children we contacted felt that the YJS cared for them and was working hard to support and advocate for them. One child stated:

"When good things happened, she [practitioner] was the first person to cheer me on. My worker also showed commitment by being there for me. She was also sensitive to things that were impacting me."

Diversity

- There is a genuine commitment to addressing the over-representation of black and mixed heritage children working with the YJS. The YJS has extensively analysed information on this disproportionality, in order to understand the reasons for this. The YJS is proactive in exploring and analysing children's lived experiences to inform its anti-racist approach. This honest appraisal and in-depth evidence informed a clear strategy to tackle these issues. The strategy is embedded and understood by the wider partnership. Progress is being made, and the YJS recognises that its work needs to continue to ensure systemic impact.
- The YJS and management board understands that the numbers of cared-for children and those with neurodiverse needs are disproportionately high within the YJS cohort. Further work is required to ensure that the YJS identifies and embeds a strategic and operational approach to addressing these areas of over-representation. This includes ensuring all policies and provision include more detail and consideration across all protected characteristics.
- Meeting children's diverse needs was a strength in both domain two and three. Practitioners were skilled at recognising and analysing diversity, including identifying whether any adjustments to promote engagement were needed. Planning was individualised and articulated how to meet children's needs. Implementation was of a consistently high quality, with practitioners using bespoke provision. Sessions on identity were completed with children, which included exploring the child's culture, heritage, and religion. This enabled practitioners to have ongoing discussions about diversity and use these to inform engagement with the child.
- The YJS has actively increased provision to meet the diverse needs of children. Bespoke interventions are available, including mentoring, culturally informed sessions and safe environments for children to assist in the exploration of their identity.
- In the resettlement case we reviewed, the practitioner considered the child and family's individual diversity needs. They had taken appropriate action to ensure equitable access to services and meet the needs of the child.
- The YJS recognised that its cohort of volunteers did not fully represent the children and families they work with. Proactive recruitment has now ensured a more diverse volunteer team. Additionally, the YJS will now employ a targeted approach for future recruitment to support a workforce that is reflective of the local population in terms of gender and ethnicity.
- In our surveys, when asked how well their diversity needs had been recognised and responded to, 11 out of 19 staff answered, 'very well', and four 'quite well'. When asked the same question, five of eight volunteers answered, 'very well', and three 'quite well'.

Domain two: Court disposals

We took a detailed look at 13 community sentences, eight referral orders and five youth rehabilitation orders managed by the YJS.

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?	85%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	77%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	69%

Assessment of desistance was impressive. Practitioners had actively sought information from other services and used this appropriately to understand and analyse behaviour. Children and families were meaningfully involved in assessment activity, which supported practitioners to capture the child's lived experience, and this enhanced the quality of assessment. The child's diversity needs had been considered in all cases. Inspectors found a strong emphasis on understanding the child's identity and whether any adjustments were needed to support their engagement. Practitioners had effectively identified strengths and protective factors, as well as exploring areas of concern. This balanced approach enabled them to analyse key desistance factors well, and to consider their impact on the child's presenting behaviour.

Practitioners were skilled at recognising the impact of trauma and early life experiences on risks to and from children. Assessments of safety were detailed and used information from other services effectively to understand the nature, context and imminence of concerns. In most cases, practitioners had analysed factors and controls that could promote safety, including identifying necessary interventions such as substance misuse.

In most cases, assessment of risks to others was detailed, and explored the nature of concerns and the context in which they may occur. Rationales for risk classifications were clear, and practitioners provided evidence to support their judgements. In the cases deemed to be insufficient, inspectors found that the practitioner had not used information from other services well enough and had not identified and fully analysed all of the risks presented by the child.

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 on our website.](#)

2.2. Planning



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

Good

Our rating³ for planning is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	92%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	77%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	77%

Planning to address desistance was of consistently high quality. There was a strong focus on protective factors and achieving aspirations, such as ETE. To build on desistance, planning encouraged the child to engage with constructive activities such as sports, music, and mentoring. In all cases, planning had been completed collaboratively with the child and their family. The child's views were valued and considered. In almost all cases, diversity had been effectively planned for. This included further work with the child on their identity to help the practitioner to understand their needs. Planning was individualised and tailored to the personal circumstances of the child and family. Practitioners had used both internal resources and commissioned services to meet desistance needs. In most cases, the practitioner had given sufficient attention to the victims' needs and wishes. Where required, planning set out clearly how these were to be addressed.

There was a clear focus within planning on improving children's emotional wellbeing through specialist services such as the forensic psychologist and interventions to build self-esteem and confidence. Necessary controls and interventions were identified to address areas of concern. Where required, the practitioner had completed safety planning with the child. We found instances where the professional network was involved in planning. However, we identified there needed to be more alignment with other service's plans when they were in existence, such as a child in need plan. This was necessary to promote cohesive working between the services.

In most cases, planning to address risks to others had appropriately considered external controls to promote safety and oversight. The interventions identified targeted areas of concern such as the use of weapons and emotional regulation. There was also a strengths-based approach within planning, which recognised the need to build the child's resilience and help them to develop internal skills so that they could better understand the risk they presented to others.

Contingency planning for risks both to and from the child was a strength. Inspectors found these plans to be comprehensive and tailored. They clearly articulated the appropriate actions and strategies to take should risks change.

³ 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 on our website.](#)

2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Requires improvement

Our rating⁴ 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?	62%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?	54%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	62%

Delivery of services focused on achieving positive outcomes for children, such as securing and maintaining ETE. Access to and integration with mainstream and community services was a priority, and practitioners helped children to build on their strengths. In most cases, service delivery had considered diversity. We found a commitment to understanding the child's identity and tailoring provision to ensure that the child had equitable access to services and that their needs were being met. However, where cases were not sufficient, interventions were not effectively sequenced or timely. This caused drift and meant that not all necessary interventions were completed. In some of the cases where children were placed in other areas, there needed to be stronger oversight and communication to ensure that interventions were being carried out appropriately. In several cases where enforcement action was required, this was not consistently followed through. We also found responses to support re-engagement including changes to delivery, were not sufficiently robust.

In some cases, inspectors found an overuse of virtual contacts including online sessions which impacted negatively on the child's engagement. This had also hindered the practitioner's oversight of risks to and from the child and the delivery of interventions to address complex needs. For delivery of services to keep both the child and others safe, there was some effective work with other services and appropriate interventions being delivered, such as substance misuse and relationships. However, the quality of these was not consistent, and coordination and communication with other services were not adequate to promote the child's safety. In some cases, much-needed interventions were not being delivered to address all concerns, including work on peer relationships. Practitioners also needed to focus more on protecting actual and potential victims to support ongoing risk management.

Management oversight was frequent, but managers needed to provide clearer guidance and actions for practitioners to promote effective case work and risk management and to improve the quality of practice.

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 on our website.](#)

2.4. Reviewing



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

Requires improvement

Our rating⁵ for reviewing is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	69%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	85%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	62%

Formal reviews of desistance had been completed in all cases. Practitioners took a strengths-based approach that acknowledged the child's progress and achievements. In almost all cases, the child's diversity needs had been considered. During reviews, practitioners had analysed the impact of services, including whether any changes were needed. They paid attention to understanding the child's personal circumstances and children and families were meaningfully involved in reviewing activity. Practitioners had sought their views on progress, and these were reflected in assessment reviews. In cases that inspectors deemed to be insufficient, reviewing activity had not always identified work still to be completed and had not triggered sufficient amendments to the plan when circumstances had changed. This including adapting delivery to promote re-engagement and readjusting plans so that all necessary work could be undertaken.

Reviewing to keep the child safe was of a consistently good quality. In most cases, practitioners had identified and responded to changes. Strong contingency plans had assisted and guided practitioners to respond effectively to fluctuations in risks to the child. Internal risk management processes had provided a multi-agency forum for services to review changes in circumstances and to respond appropriately to promote the child's safety.

Reviewing to promote the safety of others had not consistently recognised or responded to changes in the child's risks. There needed to be more analysis of intelligence and information received and, where further offences had been committed, to understand the impact of these on risks to others. There were effective relationships with other services, which had supported strong oversight. However, this was not reflected in all cases. In some, communication and joined-up working needed to be stronger. In two cases, inspectors assessed that multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) should have been considered and consultation with the MAPPA coordinator could have improved risk management.

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 on our website.](#)

Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

We inspected 20 cases managed by the YJS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of five youth conditional cautions, one youth caution and 14 community resolutions.

3.1. Assessment



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

Inadequate

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

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	75%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	45%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	50%

Assessment of desistance was balanced. Areas of concern were explored, but practitioners had given appropriate weight to the child's strengths and protective factors. This included exploring the child's aspirations and how these could be built on to support future desistance. Practitioners were skilled at recognising and responding to children's diverse needs, and assessment activity explored key areas such as religion, culture, and identity. The strong focus on understanding diversity and personal circumstances enhanced practitioners' analysis within assessment and supported in the effective identification of how the child's needs could be met. Practitioners used information from other services and meaningfully involved children and families in assessment activity. This enabled them to carry out a holistic assessment of the child.

Practitioners sought information to inform assessments of safety, but we found that they had not adequately explored this information and translated it into clear assessments of risks. In several cases, inspectors found that risk classifications were not reasonable and potential harm to the child had been underestimated. In cases that inspectors deemed insufficient, the practitioner had not adequately analysed all behaviours and risks to the child to provide an in-depth understanding of the nature, context and imminence of harm. For instance, in several cases, the practitioner had acknowledged potential exploitation but had not sufficiently analysed or understood the significant impact that this could have on the child.

Assessment of risks to others required more in-depth analysis, including identifying and exploring motivations and triggers to the child's behaviour. In some assessments, not all of the child's known behaviours were acknowledged and scrutinised. This resulted in gaps in the assessment, including clearly identifying who

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 on our website.](#)

was at risk. In several cases, the level of risk had been underestimated. Overall, practitioners needed to provide more evidence and rationales to support their assessment. Assessments also needed to recognise and explore the how risks children present to others can impact on their on their safety.

The YJS is in the early stages of piloting a new out-of-court assessment tool and it is noted the inspection occurred within the context of this being developed and trialled. The YJS is continuing to work with practitioners to embed the use of this. Inspectors found that greater oversight and guidance by managers is needed to ensure that practitioners' analytical skills are clearly transferring into the new assessment. More robust oversight will ensure that assessments are of sufficient and consistent quality, where risks to and from the child are more clearly identified and analysed.

3.2. Planning



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

Requires improvement

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

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus on supporting the child's desistance?	80%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	60%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	80%

Planning for desistance embodied the child-first ethos of the YJS. Practitioners took a strengths-based approach and worked in collaboration with children and families. Planning was balanced; practitioners paid attention to areas of concern but also focused on community integration and access to mainstream services. This included working with Brentford football club, so that children could access constructive activities. Practitioners recognised the importance of the child's culture, religion, and heritage, as well as their wider identity. Sessions were planned to explore these areas with the child and to inform delivery. For instance, practitioners ensured that appointments would not conflict with religious events or the child's personal circumstances. They considered reasonable adjustments for children and their families, such as organising interpreters. This promoted equitable access to services. They also identified and planned bespoke packages of intervention and engaged in proactive and early exit planning to support the child beyond YJS intervention.

Planning to keep the child safe had been affected by gaps in assessment activity, where not all risks had been adequately identified. Therefore, key areas to promote safety were missing from several plans, such as intervention and support to address exploitation. In some cases, planning had included appropriate referrals to specialist provision, such as substance misuse, and to the forensic psychologist. However, the involvement of other services needed strengthening to ensure that plans were aligned and that there was a coordinated approach.

In most plans to keep others safe, appropriate interventions had been identified, including conflict resolution, weapons awareness, and peer influence. Coordination with other services was strong, and we found good liaison with education providers and alignment with their plans. In most cases where there were potential and actual victims, plans identified appropriate arrangements and controls to protect them.

Contingency plans to keep both the child and others safe were not always tailored to the child and did not always identify potential risks. Therefore, actions and strategies should risks change did not adequately cover all areas of concern.

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 on our website.](#)

3.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Good

Our rating⁸ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does service delivery effectively support the child's desistance?	75%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?	70%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	80%

In most cases, there was a personalised and tailored approach to delivery and meeting diverse needs. This included undertaking specific sessions on identity where practitioners had taken time to learn about the child's experiences, heritage, and culture. Plans to meet diverse needs had been followed through, such as organising interpreters. There was a strong focus on increasing the child's links with the community and building on strengths and protective factors, such as helping the child to secure and maintain ETE. Practitioners made appropriate referrals to services so that children could have access to constructive activities, such as boxing and music sessions. However, approaches to engaging children were not always effective or appropriate. In some cases, virtual contacts including online sessions had been predominantly used and, due to the nature of sessions and complexity of the children's needs, inspectors found this to be a barrier to their engagement. Some practitioners' understanding of engagement requires further development, particularly where disposals are voluntary. We found instances where children were given mixed messages regarding the implications and consequences of not engaging with a voluntary disposal. In some cases, where engagement was challenging, practitioners needed to consider utilising different methods or approaches to support the child's motivation to participate.

There was a clear focus on improving children's emotional wellbeing. Health screenings by the liaison and diversion team helped to identify the need for specialist services, such as the forensic psychologist. Appropriate interventions were undertaken with children, including specific safety work on relationships and the use of weapons. In most cases, work with other services was effective and helped to keep the child safe. However, in the cases that inspectors judged to be insufficient, communication and coordination between the YJS and children's social care were not effective, and this had an impact on the quality of services.

Targeted intervention was delivered to promote the safety of others. This included work on victims, conflict resolution and emotional regulation. Practitioners had also used other provision to support the child and reduce concerns about risk, such as the 'Your Choice' cognitive behavioural programme and access to mentors via rescue and response. Where other services were involved, inspectors found good multi-agency work, with existing arrangements providing forums to discuss and monitor concerns.

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 on our website.](#)

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.

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- There is a joint protocol in place that provides guidance and sets out expectations of the police and the YJS. There is an effective escalation process in place if the police and YJS do not agree on an outcome.
- There is strong and consistent representation from key partners at the decision-making panel. Membership also includes a community volunteer. Before the panel takes place, the YJS meet the child and family and provide an assessment to inform decision-making.
- When the police issue a community resolution as a single agency, the YJS are notified. These children and families are offered a robust support package through the Turnaround Programme.
- Interventions are offered for all disposals. Children have access to the same wide range of services and provision as post-court cases.
- The YJS has been involved in research with the Centre of Justice to explore disproportionality in youth diversion. Recommendations to tackle racial disparities inform its disproportionality action plan.
- Feedback from children and families who receive an out-of-court disposal is routinely gathered, analysed, and used to shape delivery.

Areas for improvement:

- The partnership policy and guidance for out-of-court disposals requires a fundamental review to ensure that differences between the disposals available are clearly set out and embedded in practice. It is essential that the parameters of voluntary interventions are understood by the police and YJS staff delivering them and that these are explicitly communicated to children and families receiving them.
- Documentation provided to children by the YJS, and police is not child friendly. The language within it is not accessible or accurate and it is misleading regarding the voluntary nature of some disposals. A review is necessary to ensure that the impact and expectations of out-of-court disposals are better understood.
- Further work with police partners is needed to ensure the child first practices of the YJS are understood and to make sure that opportunities to divert children are not being missed.
- Panel members get an equal vote on the disposal decision, with the majority determining the outcome. While this is a collaborative approach, it can dilute the responsibility of the YJS and police to make a joint decision.
- Comprehensive performance and analysis reports are produced for out-of-court disposals. While these are beneficial, the YJS needs to evaluate these in more depth to inform its wider diversion strategy and influence future delivery. Any evaluation should also be routinely shared with the panel to assist in decision-making.

4.1. Resettlement

4.1. Resettlement policy and provision



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

Good

We inspected the quality of policy and provision in place for resettlement work, using evidence from documents, meetings, and interviews. To illustrate that work, we inspected one custodial case.

Strengths:

- Resettlement policy and guidance are comprehensive, providing details on procedures and expectations for the YJS and partnership. The YJS advocates for a proactive approach to avoid custody where possible, and ensures a clear offer of wraparound support when a custodial sentence has been imposed.
- The YJS and partnership arrangements have the agility to convene quickly to plan and provide resettlement support and intervention to children and families.
- We found evidence of effective communication between the YJS and the secure estate. There were timely responses to changes in risks to and from the child and information was shared to promote safety.
- Policy provides appropriate guidance on involving victims. We found evidence of the victim's wishes and concerns being considered and used in planning to promote safety.
- The importance of maintaining frequent and meaningful contact with children while in custody is understood and was evident in the practice being delivered. We also found support was in place to promote regular family contact with children whilst they are in the secure estate.
- Children who require resettlement support have access to a wide range of services. Arrangements enable community services to link in with the secure estate and begin interventions during the custodial period.
- Pathways have been developed with key partners to promote constructive resettlement and this includes consideration and planning. to meet health, ETE and accommodation needs.
- Reducing custody and remand is a priority, and the YJS has achieved consistently low numbers. It produces detailed performance data to monitor and track the use of custody and remand and provides effective oversight.
- Reviewing activity has involved the partnership, and the YJS use learning to improve resettlement delivery.

Areas for improvement:

- The YJS needs to work with probation partners to further develop transition arrangements. Clear and embedded processes are needed to ensure that a young person's move to the Probation Service is effective and timely.
- Evaluation work was showing promise and provides insight into resettlement provision. However, this needs to continue to detail more in-depth evidence which will enable the YJS to better understand this area and further inform strategies for 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.](#)