



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of youth justice services in

Doncaster

HM Inspectorate of Probation, July 2024



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The role of HM Inspectorate of Probation

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

Since our last inspection in 2015, the YJS and management board have worked hard to improve the leadership and governance of the service. There is now a strong and effective management board, who advocate for the YJS and support it in securing and maintaining high-quality services and provision for children and families.

The service has tailored its provision to meet the needs of children and families. We found impressive work to support cared for children and those with neurodiverse needs. Within the inspection sample, we found consistent, high-quality diversity work, and practitioners were skilled at recognising and responding to the individual needs of children. However, the service needs to further develop its diversity strategy, drawing together existing strands of work but clearly detailing how it intends to meet all protected characteristics of the children it works with.

Children and families have access to a wide range of services and provision to meet their needs. They include an exceptional health offer and wraparound education, training, and employment (ETE) support. There are robust pathways allowing children quick access to support for substance misuse, speech, language and communication therapy, systemic family therapy, and assessments for neurodiversity.















We found impressive work to meet the desistance needs of children and this was a significant strength of the work delivered with children. However, practice to keep other people safe was not effective and not in line with our inspection standards. In most of the cases we reviewed, risk of harm practice was insufficient, with potential harm being underestimated. Risk management and protecting other people is a critical area of youth justice work and therefore it is essential that the service addresses this as a priority. Further work is needed to improve the board's, managers', and practitioners' understanding of harm practice. This includes a full review of existing processes to ensure that these are driving improvement and consistency in practice.

There is a cohesive management team who proactively support the wider service. Staff are highly motivated, passionate, and committed to their work with children. In this report we make six recommendations, and we trust that they will assist the service to ensure a consistently high quality of service delivery.



Martin Jones CBE
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Doncaster Youth Justice Service		Score	16/36
Fieldwork started March 2024			
Overall rating	Requires improvement		
1. Organisational delivery			
1.1	Governance and leadership	Good	
1.2	Staff	Good	
1.3	Partnerships and services	Good	
1.4	Information and facilities	Good	
2. Court disposals			
2.1	Assessment	Inadequate	
2.2	Planning	Inadequate	
2.3	Implementation and delivery	Requires improvement	
2.4	Reviewing	Inadequate	
3. Out-of-court disposals			
3.1	Assessment	Requires improvement	
3.2	Planning	Good	
3.3	Implementation and delivery	Good	
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 six recommendations that we believe, if implemented, will have a positive impact on the quality of youth justice services in Doncaster. This will improve the lives of the children in contact with youth justice services, and better protect the public.

The Doncaster Youth Justice Service should:

1. complete an immediate review and redevelop risk of harm management processes; this includes providing learning and training opportunities for managers and staff and enhancing existing processes with partners to allow agency scrutiny and support
2. review and expand the offer for victims to ensure their voice and experiences are consistently heard and used to inform key areas of delivery; this includes sentence and disposal planning and risk and safety management processes
3. work with police partners to expand the diversion offer to include the consistent use of Outcome 22²
4. review resettlement provision and guidance to ensure that expectations of all services and their roles are clear and that there is consistent strategic oversight of this work.

The Youth Justice Service Board management board should:

5. work with the service to increase its and the YJS's knowledge and understanding of effective risk of harm practice; this includes providing more oversight and support to the YJS in improving its existing processes and provision
6. work with the YJS to develop diversity and disproportionality strategies; these need to clearly outline how the service intends to meet all protected characteristics and address areas of over-representation.

² Outcome 22 is a deferred prosecution involving diversionary, educational or intervention activity.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Doncaster Youth Justice Service (YJS) over a period of a week, beginning 18 March 2024. We inspected cases where the sentence or licence, out-of-court disposal or resettlement provision began between 20 March 2023 and 12 January 2024. We also conducted interviews in all inspected cases, 23 with case managers and seven with either a manager or substitute in the absence of the case manager.

Doncaster is a city in South Yorkshire located within the Yorkshire and Humber region of England. It is the second largest city in South Yorkshire after Sheffield. Doncaster is bordered by several local authority areas, including North Yorkshire, East Riding, North Lincolnshire, Bassetlaw in Nottinghamshire, Rotherham, Wakefield, Barnsley, and West Yorkshire. In November 2023, the Office for National Statistics recorded the population of Doncaster as 311,027, of which 10 per cent, 29,833, were children aged 10-17 years. Information provided by the YJS identified that 10 per cent of the 10-17 years population in Doncaster are children from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic heritage. At the time of inspection, four per cent of the children working with the YJS were from these heritages. Doncaster has notable communities from white Eastern European heritage residing in the area, including those of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller heritage.

In September 2022, Doncaster children's services moved back under the control of the City of Doncaster Council having operated for the previous eight years within a children's services trust. The YJS is located within the children, young people, and families directorate. The strategic lead for practice improvement oversees the YJS but also has responsibility for the encouraging potential and inspiring change (EPIC) and children's rights, psychology, and intensive prevention services. The YJS management structure includes a service manager and two teams overseen by operational managers, each with a team leader. The areas of responsibility covered by the operational managers are interventions, return home interviews and turnaround, and youth justice work. The wider team includes practitioners, turnaround case workers, and a volunteer coordinator. There are also a number of specialist workers, including an ETE coordinator, substance misuse worker, restorative practitioner, and speech and language therapists.

The YJS predominantly works with boys aged 15–17 years. However, at the time of inspection there were high numbers of girls accessing the service, mainly sitting within out-of-court disposals but making up 31 per cent of the overall YJS cohort. In the period of the inspection, 20 children were subject to post-court orders, one child was in custody and 41 children were subject to an out-of-court disposal. Within our domain two case sample, burglary made up 45 per cent of the cases we reviewed followed by violent offences with 27 per cent. For domain three, violent offences accounted for 71 per cent of the case sample, followed by drug and motoring offences, both at 12 per cent. At the time of inspection, six per cent of the YJS cohort were cared for by the local authority, living both within and outside of the local area. Children subject to a child protection plan accounted for five per cent of the YJS cohort, while children on child in need plans made up 21 per cent.

The South Yorkshire police service covers the Doncaster area. There are strong and effective relationships between the police and YJS, with both services committed to a child-centred approach.

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 YJS 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 collaboratively with the YJS and management board. The child-first and trauma-informed ethos is understood both strategically and operationally by the service and partnership. This approach is fully embedded in practice.
- The independent board chair is experienced and advocates for the YJS. Their proactive approach and strategic reach have supported the board’s development and assisted in securing provision for the YJS.
- The board includes partners of appropriate seniority who understand their roles and responsibilities. Board members are invested and committed to ensuring that the YJS maintains its services and provisions for YJS children.
- There is a comprehensive induction process for new board members and ongoing professional development for all existing members.
- The board and YJS have good links with other boards and services. There is a clear alignment with other strategies, which has raised the profile of the service and its work and supported joint working.
- The strategic lead for practice improvement is well respected by the partnership. Their proactive, innovative, and future-focused approach has ensured strong working relationships with services and enabled children and families to access a wide range of specialist provision and resources.
- YJS children have an impressive health offer, which enables quick and direct access to a forensic psychologist, systemic family therapy, a young person’s counsellor, a speech and language therapist, and substance misuse specialist.
- The YJS has strong strategic relationships with the police, and there is a shared ethos of child-centred practice, appropriate diversion, and increasing victim consent rates. There are two seconded police officers who provide out-of-court disposal, post-court, and victim contact support to the service.
- There is a commitment to understanding the child’s experiences of working with the YJS and using their views to influence service delivery. Initial work is showing promise, but the service is aware that further development is needed to ensure the child’s voice is consistently heard at a strategic level.

- Connectivity between the board and the YJS is strong, and staff understand the board's functions and activity. Staff are confident that their views are heard at a strategic level and that escalated concerns are discussed and resolved.
- The management team is cohesive and supportive, with lines of accountability understood both at strategic and operational levels. Communication is effective and there is a high level of care for the staff and those accessing the YJS.
- The YJS and board are sighted on risks to provision and understand the potential impact. Their proactive approach and partnership relationships allowed the YJS to respond quickly to develop a robust and comprehensive pathway for children involved in sexually harmful behaviour when the commissioned arrangements ended.

Areas for improvement:

- To assist the YJS in improving its work on keeping other people safe, the board needs to work with the service to develop its understanding of harm practice. More oversight and input into this work will enhance quality and consistency of risk management practice.
- Both the board and YJS leadership team need to further develop their knowledge of inspection standards for risk of harm and utilise learning from other inspected services.
- Due to challenges in securing a seconded probation officer, there have been gaps in provision which have impacted on practice. Both the probation service and YJS have been committed to resolving this and, at the time of the inspection, interviews for this post were due to take place.

1.2. Staff



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

Good

Strengths:

- Staff are highly motivated, passionate, and genuinely committed to achieving the best outcomes for children and families. They feel valued by the service, and their hard work and achievements are acknowledged and rewarded by managers and the wider partnership.
- The YJS has a stable and experienced team, with sufficient capacity to meet service need. Both strategic and operational workloads are demanding but manageable. Service leads proactively monitor and manage workloads and will respond to changes in capacity to ensure delivery is not impacted.
- There is a considered approach to allocation in which the skills, experience, and capacity of staff are used to determine the most appropriate practitioner to work with the child and family.
- Staff feel well supported by their managers and the wider leadership team. They receive regular supervision which focuses on their work, personal wellbeing, performance, training, and development.
- The induction process is comprehensive, supportive, and fully prepares staff to undertake their role. It includes mandatory training, experiential learning opportunities, mentoring, and enhanced supervision.
- There is a comprehensive training offer which includes specialist training, such as eye movement desensitisation therapy, speech, language and communication, and dialectical behaviour therapy. It was evident from the inspection sample that this has enhanced the direct work with children and families.
- The YJS invests in its staff, providing development and promotion opportunities. Many team members have progressed and been promoted to other roles within the service.
- The volunteer role is seen as a critical part of the service. Volunteers feel valued, part of the team, and fully supported by the YJS. New volunteers receive a comprehensive induction and training package. Continuing professional development is offered to all.
- Staff feel that their safety and wellbeing are prioritised. There are procedures and resources that promote physical and emotional safety.

Areas for improvement:

- Managers and staff would benefit from completing further external training to increase their knowledge and understanding of risk of harm and risk management practice. This will assist the service in redeveloping and improving quality in this area.
- While frequent and clearly recorded management oversight has been effective in supporting practitioners in desistance work, the quality of oversight to promote the safety of others requires improving.

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:

- The YJS produces routine and comprehensive analysis of the demographic profile of children and families accessing the service. Desistance needs are well understood with data used proactively to inform service delivery. Data is regularly shared with the board.
- The YJS and children's social care (CSC) have effective strategic and operational relationships, and the roles and responsibilities of each service are understood. In the relevant cases we reviewed, both services worked collaboratively to support the child and family.
- Children have access to a robust education, training, and employment (ETE) offer. This includes an internal ETE coordinator and in-house provision from careers advisors. ETE is a partnership priority; their collaborative approach has assisted YJS children in securing and maintaining appropriate ETE.
- The exceptional health offer enables access to several in-house specialist services, including speech, language and communication needs, substance misuse, a counsellor, forensic psychology provision, and systemic family therapy. This innovative and proactive provision is effective in supporting the neurodiverse, mental, and emotional health needs of YJS children.
- Through partnership and secondment arrangements the YJS has direct access to specialist staff, including two police officers, substance misuse worker, speech and language therapist, multi-systemic family therapist, and young person's counsellor.
- The YJS has a wide range of reparation projects which enable children to develop skills and knowledge, as well as being reparative to the community. Children will now be able to achieve formal qualifications for their work.
- Children have access to many interventions and resources which effectively build on desistance and protective factors and support community integration. Within the case sample we saw impressive work to meet the desistance needs of children.
- The YJS works with the wider partnership to address exploitation and promote the safety of children. Those at risk of exploitation are able to access wraparound support and intervention.
- The psychology team and YJS have developed an impressive pathway for children involved in harmful sexual behaviour. This enables quick and direct access to assessment, support, and interventions.
- Prevention and early intervention are a partnership priority. There are a range of services and intervention for children which aim to provide early support and avoid formal contact with the criminal justice system.

Areas for improvement:

- Although there is a strong multi-agency commitment to the YJS risk and safety management processes, partners need to work with the YJS to redevelop their understanding and approach to keeping others safe. Multi-agency input, scrutiny, and support will improve the existing approach and promote consistency in practice.
- Proactive efforts by the police and YJS have ensured good victim consent rates and meaningful work has been completed with victims. However, the offer needs reviewing and further expanding to ensure that victims' voices and experiences are consistently heard and appropriately used in disposal and sentence planning. This includes within the court arena, referral order panels, and risk and safety management processes.
- For some time, the lack of a seconded probation officer in post has impacted on delivery in risk management and information sharing. Positively, recruitment is under way and the YJS will be able to use this resource to further develop risk assessment processes.

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 of sufficient quality and cover key areas of practice. These are regularly reviewed and provide appropriate guidance on protocols. Staff understand the policies and procedures that apply to their roles.
- Children are seen in community venues and during home visits, in locations closer to home where they feel comfortable. The YJS also has access to facilities where confidential and sensitive work can be safely completed.
- ICT arrangements are effective and allow staff to work at the YJS premises, community venues or from home. The service uses the 'core plus' case management system which can produce detailed performance information and reports. Practitioners have access to children's social care systems and, through partnership agreements, are able to quickly obtain appropriate police intelligence.
- The YJS completes frequent audits of practice, including deep-dive reviews to understand patterns, trends, and changes in outcomes. This has been effective in driving quality in desistance practice.
- The YJS has completed evaluations of practice to explore effectiveness and impact. Findings have been used to shape and improve service delivery. Outcomes of evaluation are understood at a strategic level, but this information needs to be more consistently shared with operational staff.
- The service has a strong learning ethos and commitment to improving the practice. It has utilised findings from inspections and wider learning to shape delivery.
- The views of children have been used to understand the impact of service provision and inform future delivery. This is an area the YJS is continuing to develop, to ensure that children have more opportunities to engage with the service.
- The YJS has developed a robust quality-assurance framework which allows frequent and detailed opportunities for oversight of work.

Areas for improvement:

- The approach to addressing risks to others is not adequate in identifying all potential harm and necessary risk management processes. The assurance framework, including supporting policies, needs reviewing. This will improve understanding of potential harm to others and ensure that oversight processes are consistently identifying deficits in practice.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

The YJS is committed to understanding children's experiences of working with the service. Feedback is routinely gathered and collated, allowing the service to understand the impact of its provision and influence service delivery, including the development of a child-friendly plan. Children have been consulted on the YJS plan and case studies are presented at each management board, providing insight into the child's experience. Initial work is showing promise, but the service is aware that further development is needed to ensure the child's voice is consistently heard at a strategic level. Work is already under way to provide children with more opportunities to engage with the service and be more involved in operational work such as recruitment.

The YJS contacted, on our behalf, children, families, and carers who had worked with the service to gain their consent for an interview or text survey. We spoke to five children, two parents and one carer. We also had 11 responses to our text survey. The responses we received were overwhelming positive with children, families, and carers feeling respected and valued. All participants we spoke to felt the practitioners had the right skills to help them; one child stated:

"My YOT worker is the best. I didn't think I would get on with her when I first met her but straight away, I knew she understood me, listened to me, and remembered things I had said to her. She got things that were troubling me sorted ... My worker sees the best in me, she thinks about me and helps a lot."

All participants we spoke to felt that, through the YJS, they had access to the right services, rating these as either 'very good' or 'quite good'. One child commented:

"Working with my worker opened up a lot more opportunities for me, and it's really helped me change my life around. My worker helped me with college, getting an autism assessment, and helping me with my mental health. They helped me to understand myself better."

Participants were also asked what they liked most about the YJS, with parents and carers saying that they appreciated the approach by the service in ensuring that their child's needs were considered and responded to. One parent stated:

"My son has come on [in] leaps and bounds. He is now staying out of trouble and making the right choices. He has ADHD and is easily led. The worker explained things to him so he could understand. He has had an excellent service."

Another parent stated:

"She [practitioner] has been fantastic. She has provided us with emotional support through a difficult time. She has dealt with my son and the whole process sensitively. She makes my son feel safe and makes sure that my son won't get into trouble. My son is being assessed for ADHD and she will explain things to him properly and puts things in a way that he understands."

In the text survey, participants were asked to rate the YJS on a scale of one to 10, with one being 'poor' and 10 being 'fantastic'. All 11 respondents rated the service eight or above, with more than half of the scores being a 10. One child commented:

"When I was lost in life and thought I had completely ruined everything for myself YOS team helped me figure out who I really am, guided me into the right direction and helped me have a fresh start, they was always on my side and never judged me."

Diversity

- The vision and strategy for addressing the diversity of those the YJS works with need further development and strengthening. It is evident that the service has tailored the provision to meet the needs of children and families. However, a detailed strategy, which is reflected in key documents, on how it intends to meet all protected characteristics and address disproportionality is needed. This will draw existing strands of work together to enable clarity and understanding within the service and wider partnership of the strategic approach and offer for those it works with.
- There is partnership commitment to reducing the over-representation of cared for children and providing effective support and provision for those with neurodiverse needs. Existing arrangements are having impact and are enabling children quicker access to services and interventions.
- Policies detail the importance of a bespoke and child-first approach to meet children's needs. However, there is a need for more explicit information and practical guidance on how the service intends to meet all protected characteristics, including the offers for minority and over-represented groups. This will provide clarity on minimum expectations, as well as increasing awareness within the service and wider partnership of how the YJS recognises and responds to diversity.
- The ethnic diversity of the workforce reflects the local population and children and families with whom the YJS works. There are higher numbers of female case managers compared to male case managers, which gives girls the opportunity to work with a practitioner of the same gender. Future targeted recruitment could assist the service in increasing the number of male practitioners.
- The diversity needs of staff and volunteers are recognised and responded to, and reasonable adjustments have been implemented where required.
- Further exploration, analysis, and review of girls accessing the service are needed. This should include utilising direct feedback from girls, which will assist the YJS in developing a bespoke offer and approach for this over-represented group.
- The YJS produces data which explores diversity and some areas of disproportionality. However, this could be further enhanced through tailoring the routine data capture to the local context; for example, monitoring and analysing children accessing the service from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage.
- We saw impressive diversity work delivered by practitioners within the domain two, three, and resettlement case samples. Practitioners were skilled at recognising and analysing children's diversity needs and ensuring these were considered effectively in planning and delivery.

Domain two: Court disposals

We took a detailed look at 11 community sentences, which included nine referral orders and two youth rehabilitation orders.

2.1. Assessment



Assessment is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.	Inadequate
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Our rating³ for assessment is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	91%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	45%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	27%

Assessment of desistance was impressive. Inspectors found balanced and holistic analysis of the child and the circumstances surrounding their behaviour. The importance of identity and exploring areas of strength and protective factors as well as areas of concern was recognised and fully detailed in assessments. The child-first ethos was embedded in assessment practice; case managers had meaningfully involved children, families, and carers, ensuring that their views were central to analysis. This assisted practitioners in understanding and exploring the child's lived experience, including the impact of trauma on presenting behaviour.

Assessment of children's diversity was comprehensive and of consistent high quality. Practitioners had a strong understanding of neurodiversity, they recognised individual needs, analysed the impact, and identified reasonable adjustments and approaches to support children's engagement. Other tools such as speech and language screening and assessments produced by other services were used to further explore and enhance assessments of diversity needs.

Information held by other agencies and previous YJS assessments had been gathered to inform assessment of risks to and from children. However, the content of these had not been effectively analysed or consistently used to understand the impact on the child's safety or risks to others. For instance, where previous behaviours or incidents of concern were identified, these were not used routinely to establish trends or patterns to inform analysis of future behaviour.

While we saw some strong analysis of the child's safety, this quality was not present in more than half of the assessments. In many cases, not all potential adverse outcomes, such as exploitation, substance misuse, and emotional harm, had been fully identified and explored. These gaps in assessment had meant that the nature of and context in which potential future harm could occur had not been fully recognised and there was an underestimation of concerns.

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 in the data annexe.](#)

Inspectors found the approach to analysing and identifying potential risk of harm to others not in line with our youth inspection standards. Thresholds for determining risk of potential harm were very high and did not effectively consider previous behaviour or incidents, with too much focus on actual physical harm. This had compromised assessments with not all potential risks being fully recognised or analysed, such as emotional harm. The impact on victims was often underassessed, particularly where the child's behaviour would have likely caused emotional distress and trauma. Future assessments could be further enhanced through utilising victim impact statements.

The service has robust oversight processes, which include a manager countersigning all assessments. However, these were not effective in identifying deficits in assessments or unreasonable risk classifications. It is essential that these processes are reviewed to improve the quality of assessments.

2.2. Planning



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

Inadequate

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

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	91%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	55%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	36%

Planning to support desistance was of consistently high quality. Plans were individualised and tailored to meet the needs of the child, and were co-produced with children, taking account of their views, interests, and aspirations. In one case where a child had an interest and talent in music, the plan had identified this and explored funding to pursue this. There was a clear focus on achieving positive outcomes and building on strengths, such as securing and maintaining appropriate ETE.

In all cases, the diversity needs of children had been recognised and incorporated into planning. This included any reasonable adjustments and how interventions and support should be delivered to encourage engagement. For example, we saw several cases where recommendations from speech, language, and communication assessments were used to inform planned delivery. Potential barriers to engagement and achieving positive outcomes were effectively identified and addressed in planning.

Deficits and gaps in the assessments of risks to and from children had impacted on planning, with key areas to support safety not being addressed, such as substance misuse, exploitation, and peer and family relationships. In some cases, where there had been an underestimation of the child's safety and/or risks to others, these cases had not met the YJS thresholds for additional management oversight. This had meant that necessary partnership support and monitoring alongside the YJS was not present in these cases.

Planning to keep the child safe was stronger in some of the cases inspected and we saw examples of comprehensive plans which appropriately addressed all areas of concern. However, this was not present in all cases; in several, there needed to be more detail and identification of interventions and support required to improve safety, including the roles of other services.

In several cases, inspectors found that there was an assumption that safety and a reduction in risks to others had already been achieved. This was before there had been an appropriate period to test and confirm this or the completion of appropriate interventions. This had meant that key interventions, external controls or additional oversight processes had not been factored into these plans.

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.](#)

In most cases where there had been an identifiable victim, their needs and safety had been overlooked. This included not recognising ongoing risks to actual and potential victims and making appropriate plans to mitigate concerns.

Though contingency planning was stronger for keeping the child safe, this is an area that needs strengthening for both risks to and from children. Appropriate actions and responses for changes in risk were not adequately identified, including the roles of other services.

2.3. Implementation and delivery



High-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging, and assisting the child.	Requires improvement
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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?	91%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people? ⁶	45%

Delivery of desistance intervention was sequenced, with key areas being prioritised but appropriately paced to ensure children were not overwhelmed. Practitioners had effectively utilised the wide range of resources and pathways available. In many cases, children had quick access to specialist provision, including speech and languages assessments and support, referrals for autism spectrum disorder (ASD)/ADHD assessments, substance misuse intervention, and systemic family therapy. Developing strengths and protective factors was a priority with good focus on securing and maintaining appropriate ETE and providing access to constructive activities.

Responding to the personal circumstances of children and diversity practice was strong in all cases. Planned approaches to meeting children's needs had been translated into effectively delivery. Practitioners had taken time to develop positive working relationships with children, which enabled a bespoke service and supported engagement.

Despite there being gaps in planning activity, delivery to promote the child's safety was of consistent high quality. In the cases we reviewed, inspectors found no children were at risk of imminent harm. Inspectors found necessary actions, interventions and support that should have been detailed in planning were implemented in delivery. In many cases, we found proactive and coordinated work with children's social care (CSC) to support the child and family. Practitioners made referrals to CSC when needed and these were accepted by CSC with joint support offered. Where other services were involved, communication within the professional network was frequent with practitioners sharing and receiving valuable information to promote safety. Partnership work to address exploitation was a strength; inspectors found a shared and coordinated approach with regular multi-agency meetings to discuss concerns. Support to address emotional wellbeing and mental health were impressive. Practitioners were skilled at supporting children but, where required, ensured that they had quick access to specialist support.

Though delivery to keep others safe was stronger than assessment and planning, inspectors found gaps, including specific and necessary work to reduce risks. Inspectors did not find

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.](#)

⁶ Professional discretion was used to upgrade the rating for delivery from inadequate to requires improvement following the consideration of other evidence.

children presenting an imminent risk of harm to others but assessed that this area needed strengthening to improve overall safety. In some cases, intervention only focused on the index offence rather than considering other known behaviour or concerns. This had meant key areas such as peer and intimate relationships had been missed. In other cases, there was not enough work and support to promote safety, including interventions on attitudes and work on specific behaviours of concern. Inspectors also found that there needed to be more focus on actual and potential victims, ensuring that there were adequate controls in place and active oversight to support safety. This included a more robust partnership response following further incidents of concern.

2.4. Reviewing



Reviewing of progress is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.	Inadequate
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Our rating⁷ for reviewing is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	91%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	82%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	36%

Reviewing of desistance was effective in almost all cases. Inspectors found reviewing activity to be a proactive and ongoing process where practitioners continually responded and analysed changes in desistance. This included recognising the child's progress and achievements as well as areas of concern. Where there were changes in ETE arrangements there was strong advocacy from the YJS for children, with appropriate challenge and support given to providers to sustain placements. When ETE placements were lost or children required more support, practitioners responded quickly, working with the ETE coordinator and careers advisors to secure appropriate alternatives.

Reviewing of diversity was a strength with practitioners ensuring that their approach and the delivery was in line with the child's needs and was encouraging engagement. Children and families were meaningfully involved in reviewing; their views were seen as important and central to understanding progress, challenges, and potential barriers. This had enhanced the quality of review assessments, providing a holistic analysis of the child. Where there had been developments, the plan of work had been adjusted to reflect changes and ensure intervention and support were relevant, targeting key areas of desistance.

In reviewing potential risks to the child, practitioners had sought and utilised information from other services. Regular attendance at key multi-agency meetings had enabled the practitioner to share and receive relevant information, with the partnership collectively reviewing the child's safety. Changes to the child's circumstances were identified and analysed, with practitioners responding effectively to promote the physical and emotional safety of the child. This included referrals to specialist services as well as CSC, and changes to intervention and support.

Reviewing of risks from the child had not effectively identified and responded to changes or new incidents in the majority of cases we reviewed. Inspectors found that monitoring and oversight processes were not adequate in providing practitioners with information and assurance that risks were being effectively addressed. For example, in some cases where there had been an underestimation of concerns, these had not qualified for additional or partnership oversight. This has impacted on monitoring and also reviewing activity. In most cases, information had been received from other services but this had not been appropriately analysed to understand the impact or whether this needed to change the original risk assessments. This included reported incidents of violence, aggression, and alleged further

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.](#)

offending. This meant that changes in risks from the child had not triggered necessary amendments, such as a review of the risk management plan and identifying appropriate interventions or actions to promote safety.

Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

We inspected 17 cases managed by the YJS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of five youth conditional cautions and 12 community resolutions. We interviewed the case managers in 12 cases.

3.1. Assessment



Assessment is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.	Requires improvement
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Our rating⁸ for assessment is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	76%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	53%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe? ⁹	47%

Assessment of desistance were well informed by information from other services, including CSC, education, and the police. Other specialist assessments, such as those exploring neurodiversity, were utilised and had enhanced the quality of analysis. In other cases, practitioners had used speech and language screening tools to explore and inform analysis of diversity needs of children. It was evident that practitioners were also skilled at considering other protected characteristics and diversity needs. Their analysis of these areas considered the impact on the child, potential barriers, and adjustments needed to support engagement.

The views of children and families had been sought, with practitioners capturing their voice within assessments. This had enabled a holistic analysis where practitioners had explored the impact of early experiences such as family relationships and how this may be affecting the child. There was a clear focus on strengths and how positive change and development could be achieved. Arrangements with the police meant that the YJS was provided with victim information quickly where consent had been obtained. Victims' views and wishes, where relevant, had been incorporated into the majority of assessments.

In cases deemed insufficient, assessment of risks to and from children had not effectively analysed information from other services. This included exploring how the emotional impact of previous and recent trauma may be affecting the child's current emotional wellbeing. In other cases where services such as the police had information about other behaviour or incidents of concern, assessments had not adequately considered these. In some cases, practitioners needed to pursue and request more information from agencies such as the Probation Service to establish their role in working with significant adults known to the child, and if there were any additional risk and safety 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 in the data annexe.](#)

⁹ Professional discretion was used to upgrade the assessment rating from inadequate to requires improvement following consideration of other evidence.

In assessment of the child's safety which had not met the threshold for sufficiency, inspectors found an underestimation of potential harm and risks to the child. Assessments had not identified all potential adverse outcomes, including emotional harm or future victimisation. This had limited the analysis and understanding of risks, the likelihood and context of where these could occur in future.

For assessment of risks to other people, inspectors also found an underestimation of concerns and that not all potential harm was identified and understood. We found similar issues as noted in domain two cases, where there was a focus on the index offence and physical harm, and therefore not recognising other potential concerns. The impact for victims, including emotional harm and trauma, was not adequately considered. There needed to be more detailed analysis of the nature and context of the child's behaviours. This would assist in understanding the likelihood of future behaviours and risks to others, including identifying actual and potential victims.

Management oversight processes ensured that all assessments were countersigned by managers, but further work is needed to ensure that thresholds of risk and safety are understood, and assessments are of sufficient quality. The triage panel could also support the YJS in its oversight processes through scrutinising assessment activity.

3.2. Planning



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

Good

Our rating¹⁰ 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?	76%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	82%

Assessment of desistance had been translated into effective planning which appropriately addressed areas of concern but focused on strengths and positive outcomes. For instance, building on protective factors such as ETE was a key feature in planning activity, and children's aspirations were recognised as well as the steps needed to achieve and maintain placements and employment.

Plans were developed collaboratively with children and families, and their views and self-identified targets were included and presented in a child-friendly format. Practitioners had taken time to ensure that targets, goals, and expectations were clear and understood by children and families. Practitioners had linked with other services working with the child to ensure that plans were not duplicated, and that other services' roles and areas of support were understood both by the professional network and children and families.

Planning was proportionate and prioritised key areas, recognising that out-of-court disposals are short interventions. For example, where children had unmet learning needs or potential neurodiversity, support for addressing these areas, including dyslexia and speech and language assessments, was prioritised. Where children would require support beyond YJS support, exit planning had started early. Practitioners were proactive linking in and referring to other services, ensuring that support for children and families was in place.

Planning to promote the child's and other people's safety was significantly stronger than the assessing activity for both areas. There was a multi-agency approach to managing risks both to and from the child. Where relevant, planning had been aligned to promote safety. Inspectors found that discussions on risks were taking place within appropriate multi-agency forums, such as exploitation and strategy meetings, and used to inform planning activity. Where required, referrals had been made to specialist services, including CSC and mental health services.

In relevant cases, planning recognised the links between the child's safety and their presenting risks with appropriate interventions and support identified. For example, planning had included the need to address emotional regulation, understanding that this would support the child's wellbeing but also provide techniques to avoid future offending. Other key areas of intervention had been identified, such as work on relationships, attitudes, and behaviours.

¹⁰ 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.](#)

Contingency planning for risks both to and from the child needed strengthening. It is essential that responses when risks change are clearly identified and understood. This includes the recording of the actions needed and roles of other services to promote safety.

3.3. Implementation and delivery



High-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child.	Good
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Our rating¹¹ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does service delivery effectively support the child's desistance?	100%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?	71%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	76%

Delivery to meet desistance was impressive and of high quality in all cases. The child-centred ethos and trauma-informed approach was evident in all the cases we reviewed. Practitioners were tenacious in their efforts to build positive relationships with children. This included utilising a range of locations and activities to engage children, such as home visits and sessions within the community where children could access refreshments. Practitioners were creative and innovative in the delivery of work, using games and interactive tools and completing sessions in line with learning and diversity needs. This had supported the child's understanding and ensured sessions were meaningful. There was a clear focus on achieving positive outcomes and change. For example, children were supported both practically and through specialist intervention to access ETE, developing confidence and essential life skills. Specialist pathways were used, such as dyslexia screening, speech, language, and communication assessments, and referrals for ASD/ADHD assessments.

In keeping both the child and other people safe there had been effective multi-agency support and oversight, including discussions at multi-agency meetings in required cases. Communication within the professional network was frequent with practitioners receiving and being able to share appropriate information. Inspectors found coordinated and collaborative work between services, for example, joint sessions with the police and CSC. Practitioners were proactive in maintaining contact with parents and carers, which enabled monitoring and oversight of concerns.

In some cases, children had experienced recent personal difficulties, which impacted on their emotional wellbeing. Practitioners were sensitive and accommodating, ensuring that children were not overwhelmed but had access to appropriate support and care. In cases assessed as sufficient, work had been completed with children to assist understanding of potential risks to their safety, as well as key interventions such as emotional regulation sessions.

In most cases, intervention to reduce the risks children presented had been undertaken. This included sessions on weapons, and attitudes and behaviours aiming to improve the child's internal controls. Though this is an area that needs strengthening, inspectors found effective restorative work and intervention to increase victim awareness.

¹¹ 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 detailing minimum expectations for out-of-court delivery. Procedures are fully understood and are working well in practice.
- The out-of-court disposal process is comprehensive and robust. The outcome decision is made jointly by the police and YJS, and is informed by information from other services and assessments. There is consistent attendance from police, the independent chair, restorative justice worker, and turnaround manager. Though the panel could be enhanced through a standing member from CSC, social workers do attend in relevant cases.
- The child-first ethos and trauma-informed approach is fully embedded in out-of-court disposal processes and fully endorsed by the police. The needs of the child, circumstances of the offence and gravity matrix are appropriately used to determine the best outcome.
- The YJS and police have created an escalation process should the panel not reach a disposal decision. Though not frequently needed, this allows review of the case at a more senior level within the YJS and police for resolution.
- Interventions and support for children are needs-led; they have access to the same wide range of services, specialist pathways, and resources available to post-court cases. Exit planning is considered early, with children offered appropriate support beyond YJS closure.
- The YJS regularly views its practice and produces analysis of out-of-court disposal delivery. This has assisted the service's understanding of effectiveness and helped shape delivery.
- Proactive analysis and evaluation by the YJS identified that some children eligible for out-of-court disposals are being referred to court. Positively, this has been challenged and escalated work is under way to address this.

Areas for improvement:

- Planning and delivery to keep the child and others safe is a strength, but further work is required to improve assessment of safety and risks. Existing processes and the role of the panel in establishing and scrutinising assessments of potential harm to and from the child need reviewing.
- Although guidance describes the offer and approach for cared for children, as well as the need to consider disproportionality, policies could be further improved by providing specific guidance on the approach to meeting the protected characteristic of children accessing out-of-court disposals.

- Positively, the YJS and police have raised concerns about children suitable for out-of-court disposals being referred to court. However, this needs to be quickly resolved with partners to ensure that all eligible children are consistently diverted.
- The use of Outcome 22 is available in Doncaster but is not used consistently as a disposal option at the triage panel. Further work with the police is needed to expand the use of Outcome 22 to improve the diversion offer for children.

4.1. Resettlement

4.1. Resettlement policy and provision



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

Requires improvement

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 two cases managed by the YJS that had received a custodial sentence. Our key findings were as follows.

Strengths:

- In the two cases we reviewed, practitioners had been proactive in maintaining contact with children in custody and their families. Interactions were meaningful and had assisted in developing positive working relationships. There was genuine care and commitment from practitioners to supporting the children and families.
- The policy advocates for a personalised and child-first approach to meeting the needs of the children, which was evident in the cases we inspected. The individual and diversity needs of the children were considered and responded to effectively. Practitioners used a trauma-informed approach to explore and understand needs and, where required, had made reasonable adjustments.
- Planning to address accommodation started early in the cases we inspected. Proactive efforts by the practitioners had ensured that appropriate and safe accommodation options had been explored which met the child’s needs.
- One of the cases we reviewed required transition to the Probation Service. Inspectors found that this was well managed with strong communication between both services, and planned early with a full and structured handover completed.
- There are effective escalation processes where difficulties and challenges with resettlement practice can be raised and resolved at a strategic partnership level.
- The majority of YJS staff who work with resettlement cases have undertaken specific training for this role and are confident in delivering this work. The YJS has access to wider resettlement knowledge and updates through its involvement with the South and West Yorkshire Resettlement Consortium. This learning is disseminated to the service.
- Evaluation and analysis of resettlement provision are showing promise. The YJS has started to explore the impact of its practice, including children who have experienced remand periods. Research and learning from the Consortium have been used to shape delivery. Nonetheless, evaluation work needs to continue and should include direct feedback from children.

Areas for improvement:

- There is guidance in place which provides information on resettlement processes. However, this requires reviewing to ensure that the constructive pathways, roles, and

lines of accountability of other partners and other key areas of practice are clearly detailed. This will drive quality and consistency in practice.

- There is a clear investment from the partnership and commitment to providing effective resettlement provision. However, there needs to be more strategic oversight and development of multi-agency meetings dedicated to planning and overseeing resettlement provision. This will ensure that there is a consistent and collaborative approach by the partnership to overseeing resettlement provision.
- Resettlement guidance and processes for managing the child's risks to others need improving. It is essential that these adequately cover key areas such as licence conditions, release on temporary licence, and victim input and safety.
- Resettlement practice to keep other people safe was insufficient. Communication between the YJS and secure estate was not adequate to support effective risk management, and inspectors felt that their information sharing and practice to promote safety were not sufficient.
- In the cases we reviewed, there was evidence of effective planning and delivery to support the child's education and health needs, but this was not always consistent. Inspectors found some variability in efforts to identify and plan appropriate ETE options and to ensure that all health needs were met.

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.](#)