



HM Inspectorate  
of Probation

An inspection of youth justice services in

# **Bexley**

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HM Inspectorate of Probation, July 2024

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## Foreword

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This inspection is part of our programme of youth justice service (YJS) inspections. We have inspected and rated Bexley 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, Bexley YJS was rated as 'Good' with some areas of work rated outstanding. We also inspected the quality of resettlement policy and provision, which was not rated as there were no resettlement cases in the timescale covered by the inspection.

Bexley YJS has a strong and committed partnership board which is authentic in its prioritisation and care for children in youth justice. The management board is well attended and includes key strategic leaders from the statutory and non-statutory partnership, voluntary sector, and local political leaders. The management board is informed by comprehensive performance and audit data which enables it to know the service and its children well, be responsive to changing needs, and drive improvements. The board has inspirational leaders who are aspirational for children, notably, the board chair, the probation representative, and the service manager.

The service is respected and has good relationship with its partners. This supports service delivery as, alongside access to specialist and seconded staff in the service, there are a range community and voluntary sector provisions and commissioned projects to meet the needs of children. There is a strong focus on improving education, training, and employment, as well as an embedded ethos of whole-family working, including work with fathers. Development of services and support to victims is needed, which requires a partnership response.

Staff, volunteers, and managers are highly motivated, committed, and passionate about working with and improving outcomes for children. The workforce is highly skilled, knowledgeable, and experienced. Investing in and supporting staff is evident through an extensive training offer, high quality supervision, access to clinical supervision, and opportunities for professional development. Staff reported feeling valued and recognised for their work.

Desistance practice was impressive and of high quality, across out-of-court disposals and post-court work. This was supported by sensitive and meaningful diversity practice, particularly in response to neurodiverse children. However, planning practice, related to court work required development. When planning for the safety of others, work did not fully consider all presenting behaviours and factors, or consistently consider the needs, wishes, and safety of victims.














Responding to children's diverse needs was a strength from a strategic and operational perspective. The analysis of children's needs informed the development of interventions and commissioning of services to meet their individual and protected characteristics.

Listening to children, parents, and carers to inform service delivery was a priority, typified by management board members meeting children in their own environment to hear their experiences of the service and their sense of safety in the borough.



**Martin Jones CBE**  
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

# Ratings

<b>Bexley Youth Justice Service</b> Fieldwork started April 2024		<b>Score</b>	<b>27/36</b>
<b>Overall rating</b>		<b>Good</b>	
<b>1. Organisational delivery</b>			
1.1	Governance and leadership	<b>Good</b>	
1.2	Staff	<b>Outstanding</b>	
1.3	Partnerships and services	<b>Good</b>	
1.4	Information and facilities	<b>Outstanding</b>	
<b>2. Court disposals</b>			
2.1	Assessment	<b>Good</b>	
2.2	Planning	<b>Requires improvement</b>	
2.3	Implementation and delivery	<b>Outstanding</b>	
2.4	Reviewing	<b>Good</b>	
<b>3. Out-of-court disposals</b>			
3.1	Assessment	<b>Good</b>	
3.2	Planning	<b>Good</b>	
3.3	Implementation and delivery	<b>Outstanding</b>	
3.4	Out-of-court disposal policy and provision	<b>Good</b>	

## Recommendations

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

### **The Bexley Youth Justice Management Board should:**

1. oversee a review and development of the current offer to victims, both within the service and wider partnership, to enable more victims to consent to share information and to expand the use of interventions to support the delivery of a high-quality service to victims
2. utilise the current review work to inform and develop an overarching strategy which addresses and responds to disproportionality and diversity, including all protected characteristics and additional needs of children in the youth justice system.

### **The Bexley Youth Justice Service should:**

3. strengthen the quality of planning in court disposals to ensure it is proportionate to risk judgements and reflects the assessed concerns regarding the safety of others; this include making contingency planning more detailed, specific, and robust
4. improve practice across court and out-of-court disposals in relation to victim work and victim safety, ensuring planning is responsive to actual and potential victims.

### **The Metropolitan Police should:**

5. review the use of Outcome 22<sup>1</sup> or other deferred prosecution options in Bexley as a priority, and work with the YJS to ensure all children are offered and supported to access appropriate diversionary interventions at the earliest opportunity.

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<sup>1</sup>Outcome 22 is a deferred prosecution involving diversionary, educational or intervention activity.

## Background

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We conducted fieldwork in Bexley YJS over a period of a week, beginning 08 April 2024. We inspected cases where the sentence began between 10 April 2023 and 02 February 2024, and out-of-court disposals that were delivered between 10 April 2023 and 02 February 2024. We also conducted 23 interviews with case managers.

Bexley is an outer London borough on the south-east edge of the city. It has a population of 246,472, of which 10.5 per cent (26,124) are children aged 10-17. Black, Asian and other minority ethnic communities currently represent 28.1 per cent of the total population, the highest proportions of which are residents with Black or Asian heritage; this increases to 38.3 per cent for the 10-17 population. Data supplied by the YJS at the start of the inspection indicated that 33 per cent of the children known to the service were from minority ethnic populations. Around forty-two per cent of the children working with the YJS live in the Thamesmead East, Slade Green and Northend, and Belvedere wards. These are in the north of the borough and have the highest levels of low-income families, population growth, and poverty.

The YJS is based in children social care within the children's services directorate in the London Borough of Bexley. It is managed by a service manager who also has responsibility for the 'SHiFT' programme, an innovative project providing 'guides' to complex and vulnerable children. The YJS comprises two operational teams each led by a team manager. One team manager holds responsibility for court, post-court, resettlement, while the other leads on out-of-court, restorative justice, and partnerships. The teams consist of youth justice practitioners who hold responsibility for children subject to out-of-court and court disposals, as well as specialist youth justice workers and seconded partnership staff, including a child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) nurse, two police officers, a probation officer, and a speech and language therapist (SALT). Specialist workers lead on family work, education, restorative justice, and Turnaround.

The levels of first-time entrants, reoffending, and use of custody in Bexley are lower than the comparative rates for London, its statistical neighbours, and England and Wales. Of note, the latest internally recorded reoffending percentage is 15.5 per cent, and there had been no custodial sentences in the two years up until February 2024, demonstrating the effectiveness of the service and the wider partnership. Although the YJS typically works with boys aged 15 to 17 who are of white British heritage, the service has seen an increase in the number of girls subject to out-of-court disposals for offences of violence. Historically, the service has had an over-representation of Black children, however, more recently, its analysis of the rise in first-time entrants identified an increase and over-representation in children with mixed-heritage ethnicity. While small in number, the service is seeing an increase in children placed in Bexley for their safety, who are in essence vulnerable children, and families with multiple needs.

The service has a strong commitment to child-first principles which are supported by a trauma-informed, strengths- and relationship-based practice model. The ethos of whole-family working is also systemically embedded in practice. There is a strong, committed, and authentic youth justice partnership and this was evident throughout the work we inspected.

## Domain one: Organisational delivery

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To inspect organisational delivery, we reviewed written evidence submitted in advance by the YJS and conducted 13 meetings, including with staff, volunteers, managers, board members, and partnership staff and their managers.

Key findings about organisational delivery were as follows.

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### 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 Youth Justice Management Board (YJMB) actively set the vision and priorities for Bexley Youth Justice Service (YJS) in collaboration with the leadership team, operational staff, and partners, and in consultation with children and families.
- There is a strong commitment to child-first principles and trauma-informed and relationship-based practice, which was evident throughout our inspection.
- The service has an impressive management board comprising key strategic leaders from the statutory and non-statutory partnership, including the third sector, and local political leaders.
- Board members have an in-depth understanding of the profile and needs of the children they support. They are authentically child-centred and recognise that children in the youth justice system are some of the most vulnerable children within their borough. They are committed to securing the best outcomes for them.
- The chair of the management board is an inspirational leader who is well respected among the immediate and wider partnership and is aspirational in achieving positive outcomes for children in the YJS.
- The probation representative on the board is a strength in their strategic commitment to effective resourcing of the service and their objective challenge, to ensure the needs of children are recognised and responded to.
- Board members have an evident commitment to hearing, understanding, and responding to the lived experience of children. They gave examples of meeting children in their own environment to ascertain their views on services delivered and their sense of safety.
- The detailed and comprehensive qualitative and quantitative performance reporting to the management board has resulted in a board which knows itself and the operation of the YJS well. It is clear on its strengths as well as the areas for further improvement.
- There are partnership arrangements for seconded staff, in-kind support, and protocols, which support the delivery of services to children.
- Board members provide strong linkage between the YJS and other key strategic partnerships boards. This ensures a clear focus on early intervention, prevention, and effective integration with wider services to meet children's needs.

- The service manager is an exceptional leader, who is highly skilled and knowledgeable in youth justice and well respected across the partnership. Their ability to analyse and evaluate data and audit information, alongside their alignment to current research and inspection findings, supports their creativity and passion to secure best outcomes for children.
- There is good connectivity between the management board, YJS leadership team, and operational staff. Staff are consulted on their views and able to contribute to the development of the service vision and priorities annually. They are updated and consulted on priorities and progress at regular service-wide meetings. Joint service days at which the board members, leadership team, and operational staff come together promote connectivity. Board members are well known to the operational staff team.
- A staff member attends every board meeting and will explain their role, the work they undertake, and the impact it is having. There is a focus on positive outcomes and stories, as well as cases where there have been challenges and barriers to success. This enables board members to truly understand operational practice and we heard of examples where they had unblocked issues which were preventing good outcomes for children.

#### **Areas for improvement:**

- The management board needs to enhance its strategic commitment to a revision of the victim offer, ensuring that there are mechanisms to hear and respond to victims' voices, needs, wishes, and safety, both operationally and strategically.
- The board and operation of the service should ensure the current review of disproportionality and diversity practice is used to develop an overarching strategy, which considers and responds to all protected characteristics and needs of children in the youth justice system.
- Improvements are required in practice for planning, particularly in relation to the safety of others. However, the management board and leadership team are aware of this and have plans in place. This can be seen from the case data, which shows an improving picture from domain two to domain three, reflecting more recent operational practice.
- While partnership arrangements are strong, strategic commitment to review the current SALT provision would be beneficial to ensure capacity to address any future increased need.



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## 1.2. Staff



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

Outstanding

### Strengths:

- Staff and managers are highly skilled, experienced, and knowledgeable. Their practice is consistently child-centred, trauma-informed, relationship- and strengths-based.
- Although there have been changes in staffing over the past 12 months, this has been proactively managed; current staffing levels are sufficient, and workloads are manageable.
- There is a proactive and deliberate response to workload management and allocation. The needs of children and families are considered and matched to the most suitable practitioner in terms of their skills, experience, and capacity. This is monitored and tracked through supervision processes.
- There is a comprehensive, supportive, and robust supervision framework. Staff and managers consistently report they feel well supported and their needs are met. Supervision has a clear focus on trauma-informed practice and supports staff to consider children's diversity needs, including understanding a child's lived experience of discrimination, which was evident in the casework we inspected. There is guidance on the frequency of supervision based on the risk classification of the child, outside of the monthly supervision process. Supervision is supported by monthly screening audits completed by team managers to ensure that what is being discussed reflects the recording on the child's case file.
- There is investment and value placed upon trauma-informed practice, including the provision of monthly clinical supervision to support staff. The leadership team's care and value for the staff were evident throughout our inspection.
- Volunteers feel valued and part of the YJS. They are well supported by the workers responsible for them, as well as the wider service. The induction and training arrangements are comprehensive, enabling volunteers to feel prepared and confident in their roles.
- Induction processes are comprehensive and supportive, preparing staff to undertake their role. They include mandatory training, understanding specialist roles, shadowing and co-working, incremental allocation of cases, enhanced supervision, and clear probationary targets.
- Annual appraisals are routinely undertaken and viewed as meaningful to informing career progression, development, and training.
- There is a broad and comprehensive training package which supports the development of high-quality skills and knowledge, enabling practitioners and managers to respond to the diverse and changing needs of children and families.
- All staff working with children who display harmful sexual behaviours are AIM (assessment, intervention, and moving-on)-trained, supported with clinical supervision, and participate in a case formulation approach, with all cases co-worked.

- The service actively promotes and encourages staff development, and this is supported by clear professional and internal progression pathways. There are many examples of staff being provided with opportunities to progress and develop.
- A culture of learning and development is embedded at all levels within the service and is promoted by the service manager.
- It was clear from all the focus groups that staff and managers are authentic in their motivation, commitment, and desire to deliver high-quality services and achieve good outcomes for children.
- Staff and managers feel valued. Their hard work and achievements are recognised by the management board, the leadership team, the wider partnership, and each other.

**Areas for improvement:**

- Work is needed to establish whether there is sufficient staff capacity to deliver restorative justice and reparation activity, particularly given the need to review and improve the current offer to victims and extend the number of reparation projects.
- Volunteers rely on case managers' knowledge of services and interventions and feel they would benefit from a document or directory on what is available.

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## 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 service analyses and uses data effectively to inform the delivery of services to children and families. This is reflected at a range of levels, including the commissioning of specialist services such as 'SHiFT' and 'AIR Network', working with partners to respond to unmet needs, and developing internal interventions to respond to local trends and children's diverse needs.
- The YJS is held in high regard and there are good relationships with partnership agencies. These are facilitated through co-location and characterised by strong and effective communication, as well as healthy challenge.
- There are a wide range of specialist and mainstream services and interventions to support and meet the needs of children, through seconded or specialist staff, internal resources, commissioned services or access to community-based organisations.
- There is a strong focus on improving education outcomes for children, including those with special educational needs and disability (SEND), which is supported by the YJS being embedded in a range of education forums and having access to consultation support from an educational psychologist.
- The focus on family work is embedded in practice and led by the family worker, who is a passionate, skilled, and experienced practitioner. We saw many examples of constructive family work, including linking with fathers who may no longer be in the family home.
- There is a strong offer to children to meet their mental health and substance misuse needs.
- Although there has been a short-term vacancy in the probation secondment, resourcing has been used creatively and the post was filled within six months.
- While there are a limited number of reparation projects, those in place are meaningful and promote positive community capital and value, as well as supporting children to gain accredited qualifications (through the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance, AQA).
- The YJS and children's social care have effective strategic and operational relationships in which their different roles and responsibilities are understood well. There were examples of collaborative working to support children and families, as well as effective challenge and escalation where it was needed.
- There is a robust framework to oversee the risk and safety management of children known to the YJS. This includes a comprehensive range of multi-agency risk and safety management panels, which are well attended and have clear terms of reference to avoid duplication or missed oversight.

- The pilot national referral mechanism (NRM)<sup>2</sup> decision-making panel is a positive addition to safeguarding children at risk of exploitation. It is a robust approach to keeping children safe with timely decision-making that facilitates enhanced support.
- There is a strong joint working between the YJS and community safety team on a strategic and operational basis which enhances safety and risk management across the borough, particularly the peer mapping work and processes.
- The 'SHiFT' programme is a pioneering and effective response to supporting children who display extreme complexity in risk and need. It demonstrates Bexley's willingness to test innovative approaches to reducing risk and increase safety for the most vulnerable children.
- There is a strong relationship with the youth court and the service is held in high regard. During our inspection we saw examples of where YJS training positively influenced the manner in which sentencers engaged with children.

### **Areas for improvement:**

- The current victim offer needs to be strengthened through collaborative work with partners, including the police, to increase the levels of victim consent. Work is needed to enhance the current YJS offer to victims to ensure it is engaging and responsive to their needs and wishes.
- The limited SALT provision requires review to ensure the needs of children are adequately met.
- There is an over-representation of YJS children who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). The response to this should ensure that these children's education, training, and employment (ETE) needs are met.
- It is positive that the over-representation of children with diagnosed and undiagnosed neurodiversity has been identified and that there is planned work in progress to address this. This work should be prioritised so that these children are not being disadvantaged and their needs are met.
- The number and range of reparation projects need to be expanded so that children can engage in activities that not only repair harm to the community but reflect their interests and needs.
- There are constructive examples of the use children's views and feedback to adapt and develop service delivery; the YJS would benefit from increasing this activity to ensure children's feedback consistently enhances and improves the services available for them.

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<sup>2</sup> A framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support.

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## 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.

Outstanding

### Strengths:

- The YJS is impressive in its use of comprehensive and detailed performance data, alongside effective quality assurance processes, to proactively drive improvements and ensure a high quality of service delivery.
- The service manager takes a proactive and responsive approach to disseminating and acting on learning obtained from data analysis and evaluation, audit activity, inspection activity, and new and emerging effective practice.
- There are a suite of policies and procedures to guide and promote effective youth justice practice which are easily accessible and stored online in the YJS handbook. These reflect child-centred, trauma-informed, strengths-and relationship-based principles, and promote meaningful diversity practice.
- Staff understand local policies and procedures that apply to their role well, and these are utilised effectively to support the delivery of high-quality practice.
- Children are seen in a range of community-based venues or at home. The location in which they are seen is determined by where they feel safe and what is accessible to them.
- There are comprehensive procedures and policies to ensure children and staff are safe.
- YJS staff and managers have access to effective ICT systems and information-sharing agreements which enable the timely planning, delivery, and recording of work, as well effective information-sharing to support the delivery of services to children and families.
- The ICT systems enable staff and managers to work flexibly to meet the needs of children and families.
- The ICT systems and corporate data team support the production of comprehensive and detailed data and performance reports that are reliable and assist in shaping service delivery.

### Areas for improvement:

- The YJS and the Metropolitan Police need to work together to explore ways to improve information sharing to increase victim consent and uptake.

## Involvement of children and their parents or carers

The YJS is committed to understanding the experiences of children and families. Innovatively, board members routinely engage in focus groups, where they meet children in their own environment to obtain their views and understand their sense of safety. They report back to the YJMB, and information is also analysed in an annual report with learning presented to the board and staff. Children and parents or carers are consulted on the service vision and priorities. They are involved in shaping the direct work with them through self-assessments and engagement in formal review meetings. Planning practice was adapted following a focus group, with the creation of a visual plan which is co-produced with children and their parents or carers. The service commissions Viewpoint to gather the views of children, parents, and carers during and at the end of interventions. Feedback is collated in biannual reports and used to adapt service delivery. There are examples of children being involved in the co-production of resources for the YJS, including a court leaflet and reparation guide.

The YJS contacted, on our behalf, children, parents and carers they worked with to gain their consent for an interview or text survey. Seven agreed to the text survey, which was delivered independently, with three responses received. When asked to rate the YJS on a scale of one to 10, with one being 'poor' and 10 being 'fantastic', all responses were 10 in rating the service and how much it had helped children to stay out of trouble.

We interviewed two children and seven parents. All respondents felt practitioners had the skills to support the children and families they worked with. One child said:

*"One hundred per cent. I have been working with her for over a year and she has helped me so much. I am able to call her when I am struggling, and she always knows what to say to help calm me down."*

Feedback from parents on the skills of practitioners included:

*"I like her persistency. Especially in getting him to open up. She has been encouraging, and also very supportive of me which has helped. They speak to me too and include me in things."*

*"I feel they have really tried to understand the make-up of our family and take an interest to understand and help."*

Almost all of those interviewed felt they were able to access the right services and support they needed to stay out of trouble. One child said:

*"I've worked with them to access coursework in animal care, which is going to hopefully help with me getting a place at college on the course I want to do."*

Participants were also asked what they liked most about the YJS or if there was anything else they wanted to add about the service. Responses included:

*"Seeing my YJS worker is the best bit; we have a close relationship, and she has always been there when I have needed her support. I don't want to get into trouble again, and she has helped me make sure I won't."*

*"They have just been very supportive and have stopped things escalating. I obviously wouldn't have wished for YJS outcome, not happy it came to this without support from the school, but it has been helpful since he has been working with them. It's made a big difference in his behaviour; he speaks much more to me at home now when he is worried."*

## Diversity

- Addressing disproportionality and diversity is a central tenet which is embedded into the strategic direction and operational practice of the service. In 2023, the YJMB adopted a mission statement which demonstrates its recognition and collective responsibility to tackle disproportionality and ensure children received high-quality services tailored to their individual needs.
- The board and operation of the service would benefit from ensuring the current review of disproportionality and diversity practice is used to develop an overarching strategy, which considers and responds to all protected characteristics and needs of children in the youth justice system.
- The leadership team is dedicated to addressing disproportionality and responding to the diverse needs of children. This is evident in terms of meaningful policies and procedures which recognise the systemic and structural impact discrimination has, as well as in operational practice, where dedicated resources have been developed. Responding to diversity and discrimination is viewed through a trauma-informed lens, providing depth and understanding of the response to children and families.
- While the workforce does not reflect the diversity of the local population, the service has consciously addressed this through recent recruitment, commissioning a specialist mentoring provision for Black and mixed-heritage children, and training staff to be confident to meet children's diverse needs.
- Staff and managers are highly motivated, committed, and passionate. They are responsive to meeting diverse needs and securing positive outcomes for children and families. Staff take on 'champion' roles for work with girls, liaison with children's social care, neurodiversity, and diversity and over-representation. Staff have developed specific resources to respond to diverse needs and support intervention with overrepresented groups.
- There were many examples where the diversity needs of staff have been recognised and responded to, with reasonable adjustments implemented.
- The service analyses and uses data effectively to inform and shape service delivery and interventions, particularly for children's diverse needs. Examples include the commissioning of 'SHiFT' and 'AIR Network', as well as the development of a specialist intervention on girls and violence.
- The link to effective diversity practice in policies and procedures is particularly strong as it considers the impact of trauma from experiencing racism and discrimination, and the structural barriers and lived experiences children from vulnerable and Black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities experience.
- Resettlement practice is cognisant of diversity and over-representation of children from minority ethnic groups and promotes this through a trauma-informed lens. There is recognition that custody is traumatic for children, and this can be amplified for those with protected characteristics or from minority groups.
- It is positive the over-representation of children with diagnosed and undiagnosed neurodiversity has been identified and that there is planned work in progress to address this. This work should be prioritised so that these children are not being disadvantaged and that their needs are met.

## Domain two: Court disposals

We took a detailed look at nine community sentences managed by the YJS. We interviewed the case managers in all cases.

### 2.1. Assessment



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

Good

Our rating<sup>3</sup> for assessment is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	100%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	<b>67%</b>
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	78%

Assessment of desistance was impressive. Practitioners comprehensively analysed factors for and against desistance, including understanding a child's trauma and how this influenced behaviour, motivation, and attitudes to offending. Engagement of parents or carers and, where appropriate, family members, was integral to enhanced assessment practice, providing a deeper understanding of children's familial and personal circumstances. Analysis of diversity was evident in all cases. Practitioners were skilled at recognising diversity and individual needs in the broadest sense, which contributed to a thorough understanding of a child's lived experience. Assessment practice would have been enhanced if the needs and wishes of victims were consistently analysed.

A range of information sources, both internal and external to the YJS, were used to inform the assessments of children's safety. Practitioners recognised and analysed exploitation well, often taking actions such as completing NRM referrals alongside assessment activity. Children's individual needs and vulnerabilities were also considered and analysed well. Where assessments were weaker, they did not always fully consider all the risk factors and behaviours relating to a children's safety and wellbeing. As such, this practice needs to be strengthened.

Assessing the safety of others was strong, with direct and indirect harm-related behaviours analysed to inform a comprehensive understanding of the context and likelihood in which harm to others could occur. Practitioners were able to analyse the interconnectivity of behaviours and factors which contributed to safety and wellbeing and risk to others, particularly regarding exploitation. Where assessments were not deemed sufficient by inspectors, this was because not all the known behaviours were fully analysed.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

Requires Improvement

Our rating<sup>4</sup> for planning is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	89%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	67%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	<b>56%</b>

Planning for desistance was of high quality, addressing the needs identified in assessment. This was particularly evident in children's education, training, and employment (ETE) needs. Children's interests shaped the reparation and positive activities they were referred to. The service's development of co-produced plans with children and parents was clearly evident, resulting in parents or carers, and family members having active involvement in a child's plan. Plans were individualised and responsive to a child's diversity needs, which was a strength, both in terms of protected characteristics and additional needs. However, plans needed strengthening on the needs and wishes of victims.

Planning for children's safety was generally sufficient. It reflected collaborative work with other agencies and there was evidence of alignment with key partners, including children's social care and community safety. There were examples of well-coordinated and responsive planning to address exploitation, which promoted children's safety. However, in four of the nine cases inspected there was insufficient planning of interventions to meet safety needs, such as the impact of key personal relationships. Similarly, contingency planning needed enhancing as it was too generic or did not address all the safety and wellbeing concerns sufficiently.

Planning to keep others safe required development and in some cases was not proportionate to the risks presented. We identified instances where there was a lack of planned interventions to promote understanding of the impact of behaviours on victims or limited planning to keep victims safe. Planning did not always adequately address concerns for actual or potential victims and planning of interventions to address the safety of others was mixed. We found some positive examples of appropriate work being planned, such as weapons awareness or emotional regulation, however, in other cases not all identified risks were responded to. Contingency planning was also variable, and when assessed as insufficient this related to victim safety or because not all identified risks were considered. There was evidence that professional networks were incorporated into planning, this could be enhanced through more detailed and specific actions.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

Outstanding

Our rating<sup>5</sup> 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?	89%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people? <sup>6</sup>	<b>78%</b>

Practitioners were highly skilled at building effective and constructive relationships with children and parents or carers which facilitated engagement and meaningful interactions to promote desistance. This included active and collaborative working with parents or carers and family members. Interactions were sensitively adapted to respond to children's diverse needs, particularly regards their ethnicity, culture, and neurodiversity. Consideration was also given to the timing and location of sessions which supported and promoted engagement. Referrals to and work with partner agencies and community-based projects were effectively coordinated by practitioners. This resulted in interventions responsive to the child's needs being delivered and focused on building strengths and sustainable change. This included a focus on supporting children to stay in, or gain, appropriate education, training, and employment.

Delivery to keep children safe was consistently of high quality. There was evidence of practitioners engaging and working collaborative with children and parents or carers, including to develop, implement, and review individual safety plans. This was particularly creative in one case, where a WhatsApp group was created with the family and professional network to ensure prompt information-sharing to promote safety. Practitioners were proactive in their interactions with the professional networks supporting children, both for current and emerging risks. This was characterised by information-sharing, liaison, and advocacy to meet children's needs. The response to exploitation was seen as a strength, with evidence of multi-agency peer mapping, effective professionals' meetings, the completion of NRM referrals, and advocacy. It was evident that escalation to hold partners to account to ensure children's safety was prioritised and managed through appropriate mechanisms. Interventions and interactions with children were responsive to their safety needs.

Work to keep other people safe was predominantly strong. Interventions were delivered to mitigate the behaviours and needs identified in assessment and planning. We saw a range of meaningful interventions, including sessions on weapons, influence and impact of peers, the meaning of joint enterprise, and the impact of harmful behaviour. These were supported by close liaison, information-sharing and collaboration with partner agencies, such as community safety, police, and children's social care, similar to that seen in work to keep children safe.

<sup>5</sup> 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.](#)

<sup>6</sup> Professional discretion was used to upgrade the rating for implementation and delivery from Good to Outstanding following the consideration of all evidence.

Inspectors saw constructive interventions to prevent future victims, but this was inconsistent, as it was only evident in half of the relevant cases inspected. Delivery would have been strengthened by greater consistency in victim work.

## 2.4. Reviewing



Reviewing of progress is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.	Good
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Our rating<sup>7</sup> for reviewing is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	89%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	89%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	<b>78%</b>

Reviewing in relation to desistance was effective in a large majority of cases. There was consistent evidence that reviews encapsulated children's progress and positive achievements, alongside the impact of interventions. This supported consideration and use of early revocation, where appropriate. Where changes and adaptations were required, these were undertaken and were reflective of the child's diversity needs. Involvement of children and parents or carers and, where appropriate, family members is a strength, reflecting the whole-family approach. There was evidence of exit planning to ensure needs were met, particularly for education. There was evidence of sensitive relational practice regarding endings, for example, a practitioner taking a child and parent out to celebrate the end of their order.

Reviewing of children's safety was consistently of high quality. Reviews were regularly undertaken and considered issues originally identified in assessment, as well as being responsive to new or emerging concerns. This included adjustments to planning or actions being taken to promote safety. Inspectors found evidence that reviewing was reflective of, or contributed to, the convening of professionals' meetings, challenging and holding other partners to account and, where needed, escalation to managers and senior managers. Where there were changes in the child's safety, this resulted in appropriate adjustment to the risk classification.

In most cases we found sufficient reviewing activity in relation to keeping other people safe. Reviewing considered children's engagement and the impact of interventions or services. Appropriate information sharing was undertaken, and we saw evidence of joint working with partner agencies, with plans adapted where required. In a small number of cases, reviewing activity did not consistently reflect or consider significant changes, nor were plans or interventions adjusted or responsive to new or emerging risks. Further, in these cases there was greater focus on the safety of the child rather than appropriately balancing this with the safety of others.

<sup>7</sup> 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 14 cases managed by the YJS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of seven youth conditional cautions, two youth cautions, and five community resolutions or triage cases. We interviewed the case managers in all cases.

### 3.1. Assessment



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

Good

Our rating<sup>8</sup> for assessment is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	79%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	86%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	<b>71%</b>

Inspectors saw strong analysis of motivation, attitudes, and behaviours contributing to a child's offending. There was also generally effective analysis of the factors for and against desistance and practitioners used a wide range of information sources, where information was available. However, at times, we found information was not consistently provided by partner agencies which meant not all behaviours or issues could be fully considered. There was clear evidence of children and parents or carers being meaningfully involved in assessment. Generally, diversity was considered and analysed well, however there were cases where this was compromised. Fully analysing the intersectionality of diversity in children was a shortfall in practice. For example, there were incidents where children's neurodiversity was analysed well but there was little, if any, consideration of their ethnicity and culture.

Assessment of the child's safety was strong. Practitioners consistently used a range of appropriate information sources to inform assessments, which contributed to the identification and analysis of key factors to keeping children safe. In the few cases where assessing of children's safety was insufficient this related to, gaps in information sources, that the information obtained was not fully analysed, or a lack of professional curiosity.

Assessing the safety of other people was generally deemed sufficient. Overall, appropriate risk judgements were reached through the analysis of information from key partner agencies, such as the police and community safety. There was evidence that direct harm-related behaviours and the contributing factors were analysed, as well as being supplemented by consideration of wider risk behaviours and utilising available intelligence. Where practice was assessed as insufficient, this linked with the quality of work undertaken in relation to victims, both in considering their needs and wishes but also the impact of behaviours on actual or potential victims. We also found some examples where assessment lacked a full analysis of all risk behaviours or the comprehensive consideration of the context, likelihood, and impact of behaviour. Additionally, rationales regarding the risks to others could have been enhanced if they fully explained why specific behaviours had been discounted or minimised.

<sup>8</sup> 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.](#)

## 3.2. Planning



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

Good

Our rating<sup>9</sup> for planning is based on the following key questions:

	<b>% 'Yes'</b>
Does planning focus on supporting the child's desistance?	93%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	71%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe? <sup>10</sup>	<b>64%</b>

Desistance planning was consistently of a high quality. There was evidence of the locally developed co-production planning tool being used with children and parents or carers. This was visual and used child-friendly language to support understanding. Planning reflected factors to support desistance, particularly education, training, and employment, as well as activities to support children with undiagnosed neurodiversity to engage in appropriate support services. Practitioners could articulate how they sequenced planning to meet the needs of the child, although this would benefit from being more explicitly recorded. Diversity practice was a strength, and there were many examples of the creation and content of plans being individualised to meet children's diverse needs.

Plans focused on meeting the safety needs of the child and involved either specialist workers within the YJS, such as the CAMHS nurse, or included actions of partner agencies. Planning could be enhanced by ensuring youth justice and other agency plans are consistently aligned. Due to the voluntary nature of out-of-court disposals, where children did not want to engage with other professionals or agencies, these would be assigned to the YJS case manager to delivery with the support of the specialist worker or agency in a team around the practitioner approach. In most cases, contingency planning was assessed to address children's safety sufficiently. However, where improvements were needed, this related to having more focused and specific actions.

Addressing behaviours and factors linked to the safety of others was evident in planning, as was the involvement of partner agencies such as community safety, police, and children's social care. While there was some evidence of victim work, this was inconsistent, and there were shortfalls in planning to keep actual or potential victims safe. There was evidence of some effective contingency planning, but this was inconsistent. Too often contingency planning was limited, unspecific, and did not address key risks adequately, being limited to information-sharing.

<sup>9</sup> 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.](#)

<sup>10</sup> Professional discretion was used to increase the rating for planning from Requires Improvement to Good following the consideration of all evidence.

### 3.3. Implementation and delivery



High-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child.	Outstanding
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Our rating<sup>11</sup> 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?	86%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people? <sup>12</sup>	<b>79%</b>

Delivery to address desistance was impressive and of high quality. Practitioners were skilled at engaging and building trusting relationships with children and their parents or carers, demonstrating tenacity given that some out-of-court disposals were voluntary. The child-first approach was evident in the willingness to adapt contact and interventions to reflect personal or family circumstances and individual needs. Working collaboratively with parents or carers was a strong element of practice, providing a solid foundation to support sustained desistance. This reflected the service's approach to whole-family working. There was strong focus on engaging children in education, training or employment, which was supported through reading screening and SALT assessments or work with voluntary providers, such as the Shaw Trust. Responding to diversity was a strength; inspectors saw sessions that were sensitively adapted to respond to protected characteristics, such as ethnicity and culture, or additional needs, including neurodiversity.

Work to address the safety of children was built upon effective liaison and information-sharing with partner agencies, such as children's social care, community safety, substance misuse, and schools, alongside joint working with specialist YJS workers, including the CAMHS nurse, SALT, and family worker. Assessments by the CAMHS nurse and SALT worker were used to access specialist services or to support children's engagement in interventions. Practitioners worked collaboratively with children's social workers and the YJS family worker to enhance parenting capacity and address wider family needs. This not only supported family relationships but helped to address the risk of extra-familial harm. Inspectors saw a range of interventions to support children's safety, including sessions on substance misuse, managing anxiety, emotional regulation, and raising awareness of exploitation.

Work to keep other people safety was generally of high quality. It was characterised by the delivery of focused interventions to address harm-related behaviour, such as emotional regulation, weapons awareness, and peer influences. Interventions were creatively adapted to be responsive to children's needs and understanding. Practitioners were proactive in their liaison and information-sharing with partner agencies, such as the police, community safety, and children's social care, as well as working jointly with voluntary community organisations, such as mentors, to support effective interventions and prevent duplication. They were

<sup>11</sup> 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.](#)

<sup>12</sup> Professional discretion was used to increase the rating for implementation and delivery from Good to Outstanding following the consideration of all evidence.

tenacious in ensuring that children were subject to other agency support and plans, such as child in need plans, to make sure their holistic needs associated to the safety of others were met. While there was evidence of generic victim work, interventions to promote the safety of actual or potential victims could be improved. Delivery was supported by management oversight through the out-of-court disposal panel and supervision.



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### 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:

- The policy and procedures governing out-of-court disposal practice provide a clear and comprehensive framework, which is fully understood and embedded in practice.
- There is a strong commitment across the partnership to child-first principles and diverting children from the youth justice system to prevent their unnecessary criminalisation.
- There are clearly defined eligibility criteria regarding the referral to and use of out-of-court disposals, guided by the current National Police Chiefs' Council child gravity matrix.
- Children subject to out-of-court disposals have access to interventions and services equitable to children subject to court orders, so ensuring their needs are met regardless of the disposal they are subject to.
- The multi-agency out-of-court disposal panel is well attended by a range of knowledgeable and experienced practitioners and managers who are committed to the appropriate diversion of children from the youth justice system. The panel could be strengthened through the attendance of a consistent children's social care representative, though this is mitigated through the attendance of the child's social worker or early help worker (if the child is known to children's social care).
- The allocated worker presents the assessment of the child, the proposed recommendation, and the co-produced plan to the panel, who then agree the outcome.
- The escalation processes are embedded, aligned to policy, and well understood by practitioners and managers involved in out-of-court disposal practice. While infrequent, there is evidence that escalation processes are used appropriately, although this has not always resulted in positive outcomes for children (primarily due to the lack of flexibility in the response to knife crime across London).
- The YJS has taken a proactive response to the use of street community resolutions, ensuring these children are reviewed at the out-of-court disposal panel and contacted either by the YJS or the specialist substance misuse service, depending on the nature of the offence, to offer support or signposting to services as appropriate.
- The collation and analysis of out-of-court disposal performance data is comprehensive and regularly results in developments and improvements to practice, which support efforts to increase the diversion of children from the youth justice system and improve outcomes for children.

**Areas for improvement:**

- The out-of-court disposal standard operating procedures should be strengthened by providing greater detail on the escalation processes when the joint decision-making panel cannot reach a decision on the most appropriate disposal.
- The current out-of-court disposal information leaflet for children and parents or carers would benefit from revision to make it more accessible and child-friendly.
- There is an embedded commitment to addressing the over-representation of vulnerable groups and responding to children's diverse needs, particularly Black and mixed-heritage children, which could be enhanced by the introduction of Outcome 22 or deferred prosecution processes.
- The out-of-court disposal operating procedures could be strengthened by detailing how over-represented groups will be positively identified for diversion and how interventions are adapted to meet children's diverse needs.
- There should be a review of the current processes for gaining victim consent and passing these details on to the YJS, which are having a detrimental impact on the offer to victims and their engagement as victim wishes, needs, and potentially their safety are not being proactively considered as part of the out-of-court disposal process.

## 4.1. Resettlement

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### 4.1. Resettlement policy and provision

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We inspected the quality of policy and provision in place for resettlement work, using evidence from documents, meetings, and interviews. This standard has not been rated because there were no resettlement cases that fell within the inspection timescale.

#### **Strengths:**

- The use of custody has been minimised, as reflected by the lack of any custodial sentences for children during the two years prior to the inspection. This has been achieved through a positive and proactive response across the partnership, and a collective understanding that children at risk of remands or custodial sentences are vulnerable.
- The resettlement policy is comprehensive and details practice for children in custody, either on remand or sentenced. It is grounded in current and effective practice demonstrated by the links to constructive resettlement principles, identity theory, trauma-informed and relationship-based practice.
- Resettlement practice is cognisant of diversity and over-representation of children from minority ethnic groups and promotes this through the lens of being trauma-informed. There is recognition that custody itself is traumatic for children, and this can be exaggerated for those with protected characteristics or from minority groups.
- The policy emphasises the need for early and effective planning to meet the needs of children either remanded or sentenced to custody, specifically referencing work with families, accommodation, education, training, and employment, and health needs.
- There is clear consideration of the importance of responding to children's needs, whilst balancing this with risk and keeping victims safe.
- The partnership commitment to effective resettlement is demonstrated in other policy and protocol documents, such as the joint protocol between youth justice and children's social care.
- Despite the low custody and remand rates, the youth justice management board maintains a focus on resettlement and the needs and lived experience of children in the secure estate, demonstrated by the board chair visiting the only child recently remanded and sentenced to custody.

#### **Areas for improvement:**

- Given its proximity to the service as a local secure establishment, the service would benefit from building a relationship with the Oasis Restore secure school.

## Further information

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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.](#)