

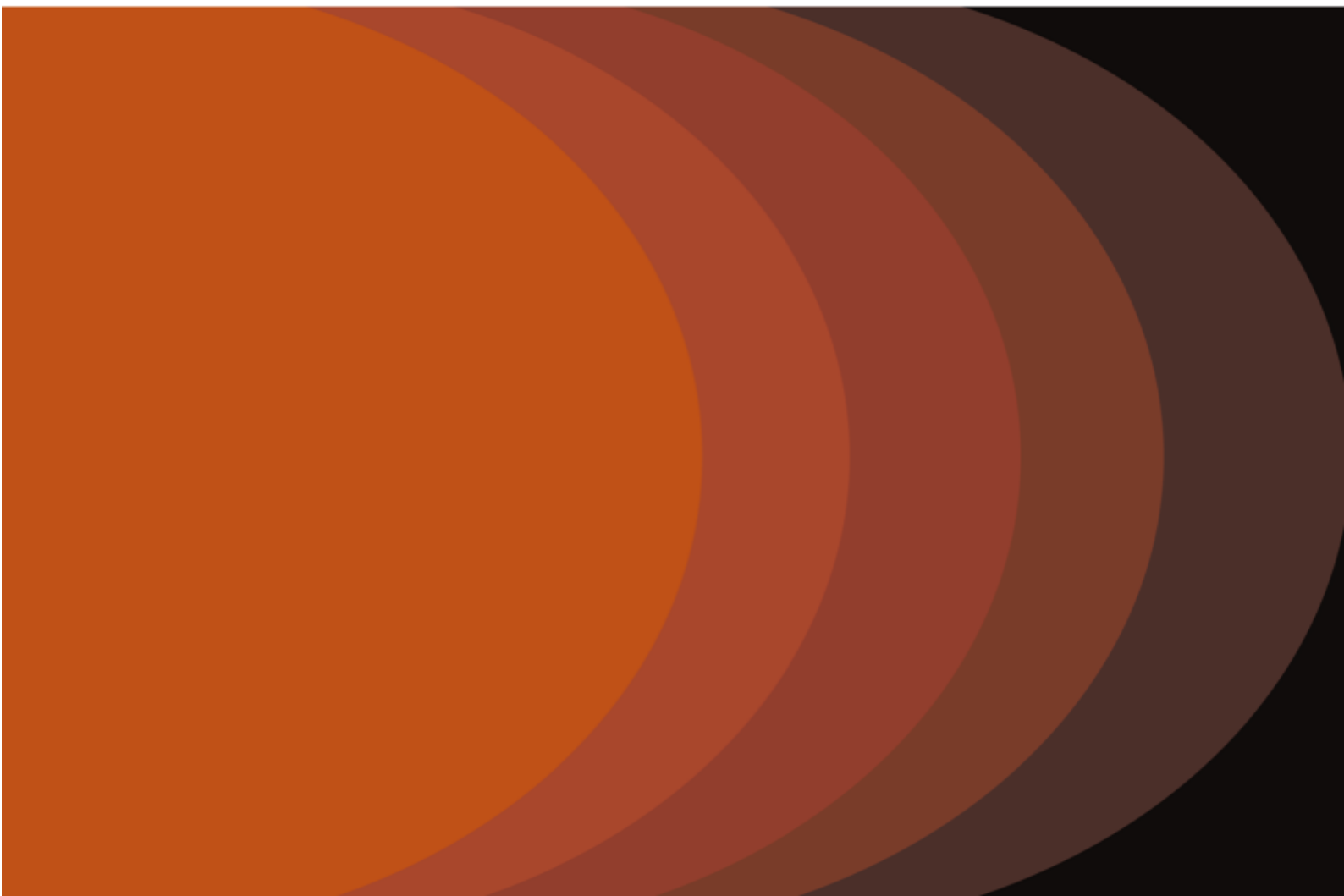


HM Inspectorate
of Probation

A joint inspection of youth justice services in

Conwy and Denbighshire

HM Inspectorate of Probation, May 2024





Contents

Foreword	3
Ratings	4
Recommendations	5
Background	6
Domain one: Organisational delivery	7
1.1. Governance and leadership	7
1.2. Staff	10
1.3. Partnerships and services	12
1.4. Information and facilities	14
Domain two: Court disposals	17
2.1. Assessment.....	17
2.2. Planning	18
2.3. Implementation and delivery.....	19
2.4. Reviewing	20
Domain three: Out-of-court disposals	21
3.1. Assessment.....	21
3.2. Planning	22
3.3. Implementation and delivery.....	23
3.4. Out-of-court disposal policy and provision.....	24
4.1. Resettlement	26
4.1. Resettlement policy and provision	26
Further information	27

Acknowledgements

This inspection was led by HM Inspector Yvonne McGuckian, supported by a team of inspectors and colleagues from across the inspectorate. HM Inspectorate of Probation was joined by colleague inspectors from police, health, social care and education. We would like to thank all those who helped plan and took part in the inspection; without their help and cooperation, the inspection would not have been possible.

The role of HM Inspectorate of Probation

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

We inspect these services and publish inspection reports.

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

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

You may re-use this information (excluding logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence or email psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

Published by:

HM Inspectorate of Probation
1st Floor Civil Justice Centre
1 Bridge Street West
Manchester
M3 3FX

Follow us on Twitter
[@hmiprobation](https://twitter.com/hmiprobation)

ISBN: 978-1-916621-21-3

© Crown copyright 2024

Foreword

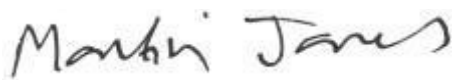
This inspection is part of our programme of youth justice service (YJS) inspections and was a joint inspection completed alongside inspectorate colleagues from Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW), Estyn, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS). We have inspected and rated Conwy and Denbighshire 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, Conwy and Denbighshire YJS was rated as 'Requires improvement'.

We inspected this service at a time that there had been significant change and challenge. We found a strong and knowledgeable YJS leadership team that has been instrumental in working with staff to provide a service to children. The team has achieved this despite considerable staff shortages and significant strategic challenges, and while implementing new policies and ways of working. That we found some positive examples of work being delivered with children is testament to the commitment and resilience of the leadership team and staff group.

However, the strategic leadership and governance of the service requires considerable development. Although there have been efforts to refresh and refocus the management board, the board is not yet functioning at an effective level and is lacking strategic direction and oversight. Vital members of the board are absent and those that are present need a greater depth of understanding of youth justice work and the unique role and function of the YJS. The board needs to carry out a detailed needs analysis of the children accessing its services, as a priority, to fully understand what services are required and how best to meet YJS children's needs. The board also needs to better understand what is contributing to the high first-time entry and reoffending rates to support the YJS in preventing children entering or escalating through the youth justice system. Board members need to fully understand their role and responsibilities, and to expand their existing knowledge and skills, to ensure their effective strategic leadership of the YJS.

Partnership work is mixed. We saw some examples of effective operational work, but, overall, the partnership is not providing the right services, at the right times, in an accessible way for children. As a collective of inspectorates, we were significantly concerned about the lack of resources and partnership focus provided to the YJS to support its work, particularly the longstanding failure of the health board to provide any of the necessary health services to this particularly vulnerable group of children. Board members and partners do not have a grasp on whether children are accessing their services or how effective the services are.

We hope that this report, our feedback and recommendations will support existing action plans to hold the partnership to account and galvanise efforts to further strengthen the board. With a view to ensuring the board is in a position to move forward positively, provide effective partnership resources, and facilitate future effective leadership and governance.



Martin Jones CBE
Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Conwy and Denbighshire Youth Justice Service
Fieldwork started January 2024

Score 13/36

Overall rating

Requires improvement



1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Governance and leadership

Inadequate



1.2 Staff

Requires improvement



1.3 Partnerships and services

Inadequate



1.4 Information and facilities

Requires improvement



2. Court disposals

2.1 Assessment

Requires improvement



2.2 Planning

Requires improvement



2.3 Implementation and delivery

Requires improvement



2.4 Reviewing

Requires improvement



3. Out-of-court disposals

3.1 Assessment

Good



3.2 Planning

Good



3.3 Implementation and delivery

Good



3.4 Out-of-court disposal policy and provision

Requires improvement



Recommendations

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

The Conwy and Denbighshire Youth Justice Management Board should:

1. Undertake a detailed needs analysis to inform the board and partnership of the services that need to be provided within the YJS.
2. Make sure that there are effective information-sharing agreements with the virtual school so that children can access the service without delay.
3. Monitor children's access to partnership services and address any barriers in a timely way.

The Heads of Children's Services should:

4. Make sure that their services contribute effectively to keeping YJS children safe and well by providing representation at the out-of-court decision-making panel, training social workers to understand their roles and responsibilities when co-working cases with the YJS, and contributing to effective joint assessment and planning.

Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board should:

5. Provide expedited access to health services for YJS children, which at a minimum should include speech, language and communication services; physical and sexual health services; and emotional and mental health services.

The National Probation Service for Wales should:

6. Provide the mandated probation worker for the YJS and make interim arrangements to support YJS staff with risk management until the vacancy can be filled.

Careers Wales should:

7. Provide adequate and accessible post-16 information, advice and guidance to all children in the YJS who require it.

Background

We carried out fieldwork in Conwy and Denbighshire YJS over a period of two weeks, beginning with assessing cases on 15 January 2024. We inspected cases where the sentence or licence began between 16 January 2023 and 10 November 2023; out-of-court disposals that were delivered between 16 January 2023 and 10 November 2023. We also interviewed case managers as part of case assessments. During the week of the 29 January 2024, we undertook a series of interviews in collaboration with inspectors from Care Inspectorate Wales, Health Inspectorate Wales, Estyn, and HMICFRS.

Conwy and Denbighshire are located in Central North Wales, bordered by Wrexham, Flintshire, Gwynedd and Powys. Conwy typically has an increasingly ageing population, while Denbighshire has a larger youth population. Both counties have broadly similar economic activity rates. Areas of Denbighshire have high levels of deprivation, particularly the coastal town of Rhyl.

For out-of-court disposal cases 11 per cent of children known to the YJS are also subject to child protection proceedings, 10 per cent are children in care, 30 per cent have been identified as children in need of support, 40 per cent of children have also been identified as having experienced domestic abuse, and 35 per cent of children have parents who have substance misuse issues. For court disposal cases, 31 per cent of children known to the YJS are also subject to child protection proceedings, 15 per cent are children in care, 62 per cent have been identified as children in need of support, 46 per cent of children have also been identified as having experienced domestic abuse, and 38 per cent of children have parents who have substance misuse issues (information supplied by YJS as part of evidence in advance infographic). Published data for the period January 2022 and December 2022 records a first-time entry rate (per 100,000) of 236, where the average for Wales was 143 and for England and Wales was 149, at one point being the second highest in England and Wales. It is noted that the board considered this figure to be inaccurate.

Conwy and Denbighshire YJS is a dual local authority YJS. Conwy local authority hosts the service, with the intention of strategic and operational links at all levels between Conwy and Denbighshire. The YJS is overseen by the strategic director for social care and education for Conwy, who is also the chair of the board. The working base for the service is in Colwyn Bay. Line management of the service sits with the head of children, families and safeguarding in Conwy, and the service manager is a member of the service manager team within social care for both local authorities.

We inspected the service at a time when it had undergone 18 months of significant instability, including a complete change of the management team. The management arrangements remained interim throughout this period, which delayed decision-making and progress of the YJS, and, despite the best efforts of the YJS managers, resulted in a period of considerable uncertainty for all staff. Permanent recruitment to the management posts was agreed in January 2024, shortly before our inspection.

At the time of our inspection, we identified insufficient partnership services in a number of key areas, including health, education, children's safety and wellbeing, and understand the risk of harm children present to others. We identified the number of specialist workers on the team had considerably reduced, and there had been a move to provide services using universal pathways, which resulted in a reduced specialist provision to meet the needs of accessing the YJS.

Domain one: Organisational delivery

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

Key findings about organisational delivery were as follows.

1.1. Governance and leadership



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

Inadequate

Strengths:

- The YJS leadership team are highly regarded, work exceptionally well together, and have supported the staff team through a particularly difficult 18 months.
- The leadership team have been instrumental in shaping the work of the service and the board. As a result, staff have been able to hold complex cases despite the absence of partnership workers embedded in the service.
- A refresh of the board's membership has taken place, including a renewed induction for new members. The chair of the board is determined to get the right members in place to improve partnership working, scrutiny and governance.
- The board has held a development day, with the support of YJB Cymru, to help members to understand their roles and responsibilities.
- There is a vision for the service, this has been developed by the service manager and closely linked to improving the quality of services offered to children. This aligns with the relevant evidence base and priorities for children in Wales. The YJS plan sets objectives and is underpinned by a clear action plan.
- The YJS team leadership and staff teams pay attention to supporting Welsh culture, identity and language.

Areas for improvement:

- The board is not yet realising the vision and strategy for the service. It lacks a mature understanding of youth justice work and its unique role and function.
- Some board members are new and not yet able to provide effective support for the YJS or challenge it about some of the significant deficits noted during this inspection.
- We agree with the board that its challenges are around setting direction, leadership and ownership, consistency of attendance, and the need to align its work with other strategic partnerships.
- YJS children do not have sufficient priority across the partnership. There is no clear, shared understanding at a strategic level of how the board intends to

provide the services that children need in order to prevent them from offending or from entering the criminal justice system.

- Board members are not advocating well enough for the YJS children in their own organisations. Some board members have an over-optimistic view of the board's current effectiveness and underestimate some significant risks to service delivery.
- Recent improvements in the board's governance have been made, but these are insufficient to bring about the changes needed to provide effective partnership contributions to the YJS.
- There is no effective partnership work between Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and the YJS.
- The lack of a suitably senior health representative on the board is a significant and longstanding issue that needs to be addressed urgently. This has led to YJS children not being able to access health services in a timely way.
- Board attendance is inconsistent, with a lack of parity between Conwy and Denbighshire members. Denbighshire partners are under-represented at the board and at a strategic level and need to be more proactive role in making sure that they are contributing to the work of the service.
- Not all agencies are represented on the board, and there has been, and remains, a lack of challenge between partners.
- Board members do not have access to the necessary data and information to understand the service's performance or service provision. In particular, other than some basic characteristics, the understanding of this cohort of children, their needs, and the quality of work delivered to them, remains limited. The board and partners urgently need to identify, review, and analyse information to enable them to evaluate their current services, map them against children's needs, and consider the quality-of-service children receive.
- Board members have no shared understanding of how child-first principles should translate into practice and service delivery.
- The board does not understand key performance information well enough.
- Although the board gathers the views of children and families, members do not know if their services are used effectively or whether they are meeting YJS children's needs.
- There is limited focus on diversity and equality for children who are from Black and mixed heritage communities. We saw some effective examples in case work but there were no systems or processes in place to track, analyse and monitor disproportionality.
- Board members have not taken sufficient action to provide support, even on an interim basis, to mitigate the staffing difficulties. There is no clear plan that sets out how the board intends to reduce the level of staff vacancies in the short or long term.
- There is an urgent need to bolster management capacity so that partnership work can be developed. It is hard to see how the board's access to information and data can improve without specialist additional provision, including business support.

- The action plan produced by the board is general in nature and it is difficult to see how some longstanding issues will be rectified.
- A priority is to understand the reliability and accuracy of the data on first-time entrants and then use this to help all partners understand which children need a differentiated response, including children in care and those being exploited.

1.2. Staff



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

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- The YJS leadership team have worked hard to build the staff team's resilience over the last 18 months. They have provided training and one-to-one support for the whole team.
- The leadership team have provided clear and consistent messages to staff, have stood alongside the team during the difficult times and fulfilled their pledge to offer support and challenge. This has included developing an open culture where the views and ideas of staff are gathered and responded to as far as possible.
- Trust between staff and managers has been developed and staff are now confident in the decisions made by managers. Staff described managers as accessible and available and felt confident in discussing case management issues with them, either in formal reviews such as high-risk panels or more frequently as matters arose.
- The staff group were complimentary and positive about the new leadership team and their ability to manage and lead the team towards better practice. We were confident that the leadership team knew what good practice was, and that they had the skills and knowledge to support staff to achieve this.
- Management oversight of work is effective and has improved case management. Staff were positive about management oversight, and we found good levels of effective supervision and support that led to improvements in practice. This included examples of escalation by leaders when they came across barriers faced by staff and children. In the cases we inspected, we judged that management oversight met the needs of the case in 88 per cent of domain two and 83 per cent of domain three cases.
- Staff felt that the frequency of supervision was just right. In our staff survey, 17 out of 20 said that the quality was 'very good', with the remaining three saying it was 'quite good'.
- Staff have developed the confidence and skills to apply a consistent approach to working with children. This includes implementing a child-first approach and trauma-informed practice.
- Despite shortfalls in staffing levels, case managers are positive about their work with children and families and remain highly motivated. Staff often went above and beyond to help children access services and to deliver necessary interventions.
- Staff have access to a range of training and support. Their training needs are identified, and training plans for staff are in place. This includes access to professional qualifications. There is a culture of ongoing learning and support, including learning from regional and national initiatives and research.

- The training plan for 2023/2024 focuses on embedding a child-first approach and best practice guidance, trauma-informed practice, and improving staff's assessment skills and safeguarding knowledge to address the needs of vulnerable young people.
- Staff have also received bespoke training on resilience. This was delivered by Bangor University as part of a new approach developed by the university, which is linked to an ongoing research project associated with Hwb Doeth. This was a priority to support staff's wellbeing and mental health.
- Staff engagement levels are good. Consultation with staff is ongoing and leads to adaptations in service delivery.
- The service actively manages workloads. Staff have been able to support each other during periods of shortage and to cover some long-term sickness absences.
- The workforce represents the culture of Wales. Children are able to work with staff who speak both Welsh and English. The YJS understand the implications for children who are placed in England, where they would not automatically access the Welsh curriculum, and advocates for children's needs to be met.

Areas for improvement:

- Staffing levels are insufficient. The vacancy rate is approximately 25 per cent, although inspectors noted that this is an improvement from 47 per cent six months ago. There are vacancies in all areas of the service, including a probation officer, a child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) worker, case managers, business support staff and managers.
- There is no dedicated specialist provision for health, a lack of partnership work around child criminal and child sexual exploitation, mixed quality of relationships with social care services, and high levels of long-term sickness absence. The loss of a parenting worker has been particularly difficult, given parents' level of need for support with substance misuse and domestic abuse and the number of children who have parents in custody.
- Workloads are at the maximum and are not sustainable. This is compounded by the amount of time YJS staff have to spend chasing partnership staff for information and access to services.
- The lack of specialist workers leads to significant gaps in knowledge. This is particularly acute around neurodiversity; speech, language and communication; post-16 education, training and employment (ETE) advice and guidance; and the interface between YJS and probation.

1.3. Partnerships and services



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

Inadequate

Strengths:

- The board recognises that it needs better data. The head of service promotes the use of data and understands the need to use it fully to inform partnership provision and services. The service has started to develop its victim work; for example, it has established systems to obtain information on victims.
- Partnerships with the police are effective. The YJS is supported by North Wales Police through the seconded police officer. It has access to other departments; for example, it works with the ONYX team to support children who are exploited. There are links between the YJS police and local policing teams to address anti-social behaviour and low-level criminality involving children.
- The ETE worker is helping to develop relationships with schools, in order to share information, assess risk and provide support to help children get back into education.

Areas for improvement:

- Partnership working is a critical area for the service. We are not confident that all children receive the range of good-quality, personalised services that they need. There are insufficient partnership services in a number of key areas, including health, education, safety and wellbeing, and risk of harm.
- The number of specialist workers on the team has reduced, and there has been a move to provide services using universal pathways. Referrals are made in the same way as for any other child. Pathways and referral routes are complicated, ineffective, or non-existent, and there is no clear and consistent commissioning strategy for the unique needs of YJS children. YJS children receive limited specialist support. This complex group of children often requires specialist services to support desistance, promote safety and wellbeing, and keep other people safe, delivered directly, with the aim of supporting future access via universal services.
- Waiting lists are lengthy for many services, and there are few ways to fast-track children, including those who pose a risk to other people.
- Multi-agency meetings to support children's safety and wellbeing and risk of harm to others were ineffective and lacked focus.
- There is no up-to-date and sufficient analysis of children's desistance needs, and safeguarding issues or services required to manage risk of harm. Decisions are made on partial data.
- Specialist workers are not embedded in the YJS service, including workers who provide support for children at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation, speech, language and communication workers, and post-16 careers advice. Some of the statutory services are absent, including probation and health. The lack of a probation officer has had an impact on transitions and the management of risk and children's safety and wellbeing.

- We assessed a number of cases where a child had a parent in custody. A lack of communication and joint planning meant that the identified risk to children from these adults was not being analysed effectively or understood.
- There is no direct provision for health services, including mental and physical health, neurodiversity, and speech, language and communication provision.
- The 16-plus careers advice service has recently been removed from the YJS. This is a retrograde step.
- New staff employed to deliver services directly are still settling in. Although they are promising, they are not yet fully effective.
- Referral systems are not clear or systematic, and there is very limited tracking of service take-up against need. Partners did not know if children open to YJS were accessing their services or if the service provision was sufficient. The partnerships do not use segmented data to understand the service the children are receiving.
- Not all partnership staff understood how they should and could contribute to working with YJS.
- There is very little review and evaluation of the quality-of-service delivery by partners. This has not been informed by feedback from children or parents and carers.
- Multi-agency child exploitation arrangements and risk management arrangements lacked clarity and coherence. Internal YJS risk management meetings were given less priority across the partnership than other multi-agency meetings.

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.

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- IT systems are in place to share information with the police, and to support effective case management.
- There is a range of new and up-to-date policies and procedures. Staff have been trained and supported in their use.
- Children are seen in a range of venues in the community. Few are seen at the main office.
- Children from Denbighshire have some difficulty accessing the central office in Colwyn Bay, due to travel times and distances.
- Children were consulted about the use of premises, and a participation strategy is in place. This is the start of work to consult with children and use their feedback to shape services.
- The police officer has full access to police and YJS IT systems, and a good working knowledge of them. The police records management system has an effective flagging system. YJS police officers use this to good effect for all children managed by the YJS.
- The head of service is integrated effectively into Wales regional learning systems and academic research.

Areas for improvement:

- Policies have not been fully implemented because of the lack of effective work with partner agencies and because partnerships workers do not understand their roles and responsibilities.
- The use of data and information to improve services is very limited and only just beginning. This has been affected by a shortage of business support staff. The recent implementation of the Child View case management system has improved the services ability to access reliable information to managers and the board, but the development of data and performance information had only just started.
- The YJS's policy documents include the need to identify disproportionality and its impact. However, this has not led to specific strategies to analyse whether there is disproportionate sentencing or outcomes for specific groups.
- Access to information on ETE, including school attendance, is improving. But systems are not streamlined and there is no direct access to education data. This is provided on a school-by-school basis.
- There is no central point of access to health information, including notifications about children who have been seen at an accident and emergency department. Notifications would have to come through the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). While there are good systems in place at Conwy, these do not exist at Denbighshire.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

The YJS has developed a participation strategy, in line with the Welsh Government's expectation that all children should be consulted on the services that affect them. The strategy has been led by the head of service and is supported by the staff team.

Children's views have recently been shared with the youth justice management board, and this has been instrumental in helping the board to understand how children come to be involved with criminal justice agencies. Consultation with and participation of children are priorities for the board, and it has set actions on how to achieve this.

In case work we inspected, we found that practitioners routinely sought children's views and perspectives, and those of their parents. Their views were used to inform assessments and give direction to plans. Staff took opportunities to support parents in strengthening their relationships with children.

We tried to speak to children directly but none of them took up the offer of a discussion with us. One parent spoke to us and was complimentary about the work undertaken with her child:

"She told us that her son did not have many male role models. She praised the worker for being able to relate to her son like an adult – showing no judgement or treating him too much like a child. She went on to say that access to education was a gap for her child but didn't see this as an issue for the YJS, who seemed to have tried hard to resolve it."

The YJS contacted, on our behalf, children and parents who had open cases at the time of the inspection, to gain their consent for a text survey. We delivered the survey independently to the six who consented, and five replied. Overall, the comments and feedback were positive about the work the service was delivering and included:

"The contact we have had with them has been good and the person we see is easy to talk to and very helpful and polite."

"My son has stayed away from all the people he associated with that he got into trouble with and has continued to stay away from trouble."

Diversity

The YJS has paid attention to the requirements of the Welsh Government. Its policies and procedures are in line with the relevant blueprints and aspirations for children in Wales.

Children are able to access Welsh-speaking staff. Documents are available in both Welsh and English for children and parents. Staff understood the importance of recognising children who are bilingual and using the Welsh language when working with them. The service provides good opportunities for children to work with staff who promote and establish Welsh identity and culture in service delivery.

We saw examples of staff tailoring their approaches in order to meet a wide range of diverse needs. For example, they adapted language to improve children's comprehension, saw children around their school and work commitments and, in particular, helped children to access and be part of their community.

The service has considered how it is working with girls and was looking at how work with them could be most effective. Staff we spoke to understood that girls engage with the service differently and tailored their work appropriately.

Practitioners had recognised children's diverse needs in 75 per cent of the domain two cases that we inspected. This fell to 67 per cent for out-of-court disposals.

A detailed strategic needs analysis would help the partnership to tailor services to the breadth and range of diversity within the YJS cohort.

There is a long waiting list for support with neurodiverse needs, and few pathways to fast-track YJS children. Although staff did their best to support them, some children had never had their neurodiverse needs assessed by a health professional. As a result, these needs remained unmet. For children with potential speech, language and communication needs, the picture was similar. Although waiting lists were shorter, a child could be almost at the end of an out-of-court disposal before being assessed.

There were no systematic, planned pathways of intervention or support for successful engagement in ETE based on knowledge of the cohort. For example, there was no strategy to help children make good progress in literacy and numeracy or Welsh language, or to address the high level of use of part-time timetables in education.

The lack of capacity and access to specialist support made setting up systematic pathways difficult. The use of additional learning needs coding was confused, which meant that children's additional learning needs were not sufficiently assessed or known.

There has been no disaggregation of data to review the outcomes for Black and mixed heritage children, although the numbers are increasing in the general population in Denbighshire. While numbers are low in Conwy, those children will be highly visible in their communities and a better understanding of their experiences is essential.

There has been little consideration of children who come from diverse communities, how they access services and whether they have equal outcomes. Recidivism data produced by the YJS leadership team is not broken down into data that shows whether children from diverse backgrounds are supported appropriately.

Domain two: Court disposals

We took a detailed look at eight community sentences managed by the YJS.

2.1. Assessment



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

Requires improvement

Our rating¹ 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?	50%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	63%

Assessment activity around supporting children's desistance needs was focused, consistent, and analytical. Practitioners effectively considered what support and help children needed to stop or reduce offending. Staff developed a good understanding of children's needs and helped the children to talk about their lives and what was contributing to offending. Staff had made productive and consistent contact with parents to obtain their views and balanced these with the views of the children.

Assessment activity around children's safety and wellbeing was inconsistent. A high proportion of children known to the YJS needed care and support to keep them safe.

Over the past year, high levels of children had been at risk of or were being exploited. To fully understand these risks, the YJS, social care and police needed to work more closely together to identify concerns and current information. We found that, despite the best efforts of case managers, some information was not provided quickly enough to support assessment activity. When case managers had good relationships with other workers, particularly social workers, we saw examples of a joint understanding of the child's needs. As a result, assessing was accurate and gave a holistic view of the child. However, there needed to be a more systematic and wider understanding of the contribution that partners should be making to assessment activity and where relationships were not as established, we identified gaps in the sharing of information and critical areas where work to support and safeguard children was not completely sufficiently or consistently.

Work to assess the risk of harm children posed to others was mixed, although staff were good at drawing out known triggers and the contexts in which harm may be present. Children known to the service did not have fast-track access to specialist assessments. This included assessments of speech, language and communication and neurodiversity needs, even though almost half of the children were suspected of being neurodivergent. Case managers could try to judge the impact of these factors on a child's likelihood of harming others, such as using violence when frustrated or being unable to communicate effectively, but without the specialist support usually found in a YJS, they could not verify this. Assessment activity was weaker as a result in relation to keeping others safe.

¹ 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 rating² for planning is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	88%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	50%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	75%

We found that planning to support desistance was well focused and proportionate. The YJS provided range of interventions, and case managers considered those in their planning that would be of most benefit to the child. Children, parents, and carers had been spoken to about plans, and these had been tailored to include the issues that they felt were most important. Thought had been given in planning to the sequencing of interventions and where they would be delivered.

In half of the cases where there needed to be clear planning with other partners to keep children safe, this either had not happened or was ineffective. In a few cases, despite case managers' work to engage other partners, there was a lack of understanding of how agencies should be supporting each other's work. Partners relied too much the YJS to produce a plan that would deal with the behaviours that stemmed from the child's situation rather than working on these collaboratively. This was particularly the case with social care, where we noted some difficulties in obtaining care plans and a lack of joined-up thinking or working. When this happened, it was difficult for YJS staff to identify how their work needed to be planned in order to avoid duplication and support the work already agreed by other agencies. As a result, planning often became generic rather than specific.

Planning identified a range of work designed to reduce the child's risk of harm to others, including one-to-one work, victim awareness and reparation work. Discussions had been held with the children about the risks they thought they posed to other people, and these were included in plans. It was positive to note that this included consideration of how the child may be viewed by the community and the impact on wider family members.

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

2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Requires improvement

Our rating³ 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?	63%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	75%

YJS staff delivered the interventions and actions that they had planned and added further interventions when children required them. We found staff working with persistence and determination to draw in other agencies when they needed to work jointly. This was sometimes achieved by escalating issues across team managers and heads of service to deal with barriers. Management oversight had been used effectively so that practitioners and team managers had frequent discussions about the progress being made and which interventions had been delivered. This had resulted in responsive desistance work being undertaken. When necessary, staff took active steps to re-engage children if they lost motivation or failed to engage with the requirements of their orders.

We found good use of a range of community-based support services, including a project called the Youth Shedz Cymru. This project worked directly with children aged from nine onwards to engage them in the local community through project-based activities. The project aimed to help children develop new skills and interests and had a clear focus on giving back to the community while developing skills. Projects included repair of bikes, gardening, and motor mechanics.

Work needed to be better coordinated to keep children safe. We saw some effective joint work, but in a few cases, agencies were working in isolation from each other rather than together. This was evident when agencies were working with multiple family members. In one example, there were numerous agencies involved with one family, including the police, social care, education, the domestic abuse service, CAMHS and family support. Some services were for the child's mother; others were for young person; others were for siblings. Although there was a lot of activity, agencies seemed to be working in isolation. They only came together to inform each other about what they were doing, instead of intervening according to a common formal plan and making decisions in a multi-agency, co-ordinated manner. As a result, some issues fell between agencies.

³ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available on our website.](#)

2.4. Reviewing



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

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

	% 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	75%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	50%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	63%

Reviewing was part of day-to-day case management, so in most cases, when new information became known, it was considered quickly. Formal reviews were responsive to changes. There was a clear focus on supporting the child's protective factors and understanding whether the child's social and family context had changed. Reviewing of desistance led to adjustments and changes in the approaches being delivered. These aimed to keep the child engaged and motivated, and included changing where the child was seen and the duration of sessions if they had disengaged. If children did not seem to be benefiting from interventions, these were changed, reviewed and refreshed to maximise their impact.

Vacancies for partnership workers, especially in probation, meant that there was a lack of joint planning when reviews identified there was an increased risk to children from others. An example included when a parent was in prison and posed a danger to a child. Reviewing appropriately identified a change in circumstances, such as the parents' pending release from custody. However, we limited information had been shared by probation about release dates, addresses or plans to keep the child safe. This meant that safety plans for the child could only be made at the last minute and prevented effective forward planning.

Generally, YJS case managers were invited to reviews held by other agencies, but it was difficult to track which meetings took priority. High risk panels, held by the YJS, were sometimes cancelled if there was a core group or professionals meeting already planned. Whilst this makes sense in terms of effectively utilising meetings, we found those meetings taking priority did not necessarily pull together all aspects of the child, and their needs, to ensure a co-ordinated and cohesive response to supporting the child's safety and wellbeing or managing their risk to others effectively.

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

Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

We inspected 12 cases managed by the YJS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of two youth conditional cautions, two youth cautions, and eight community resolutions. We interviewed the case managers in 11 cases.

3.1. Assessment



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

Good

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

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	83%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	75%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	67%

Assessment activity of children who were subject to out-of-court disposals were undertaken to a consistent standard. There were a range of checks and balances in place that resulted in assessments setting out clearly the issues that had contributed to a child's offending. The child's strengths were identified well, and the views of victims were available to support the assessment activity. We found that children's, parents' and carers' views were considered and included. The addition of a social care representative on the panel would support the use of safeguarding information and decision-making at the earliest opportunity and we found the use of safeguarding information held by other agencies needed strengthening. The use of ETE information consistently and effectively contributed to an assessment of children's ETE need.

When assessing the potential risk of harm to others, classifications were justifiable. However, assessment activity tended to focus on the most recent incident, rather than considering behaviours in a holistic manner to inform assessment activity. We also saw some delays in cases being processed to the YJS, and considered these delays made it difficult for some case managers to balance the potential concerns with the time elapsed since the incident.

Good oversight of assessment activity was provided by managers to practitioners and this supported case managers in their practice.

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

3.2. Planning



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

Good

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

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus on supporting the child's desistance?	92%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	75%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	67%

The quality of assessments and the panel contribution to identifying next steps facilitated effective planning, particularly in relation to supporting children's desistance. We saw examples of the panel giving clear direction for the areas that needed to be worked on with the child, which were then translated into planning activities. Using the planning and support plan (PASP), practitioners set out clear actions to take, including a range of interventions matched to the offence, which also considered the child's needs. The PASP provided a good mechanism of combining the plan with the assessment.

We also saw the inclusion of children and parent or carers views in the development of plans.

In one case we noted:

"Planning involved the child and allowed him to contribute to what he believed will assist him in terms of his behaviour and his future. Stabilising his ADHD condition through his GP and CAMHS was outlined as a means to positively impact his desistance. Planning considered the child's attachment needs, how his ADHD impacts upon his concentration levels, and identifies his positive interests."

To improve planning, the YJS needed to co-ordinate its work better with that of partner agencies. This was especially the case for exit planning, when the, primarily voluntary, nature of contact with the YJS ended, and other agencies were needed to provide ongoing support. The YJS also needed to include effective contingency planning more consistently, for the risks that could be anticipated, as part of the PASP processes.

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

3.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Good

Our rating⁷ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does service delivery effectively support the child's desistance?	92%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?	75%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	92%

Implementation and delivery for out-of-court disposals was the YJS's strongest area of work and it is testament to practitioners that they had adapted their ways of working to give children the best possible outcomes in the absence of effective partnership services. We found examples of case managers using workbooks to support emotional and mental health, substance misuse interventions such as SWEET, the use of the good lives model, and the one punch workbooks. Case managers also demonstrated considerable tenacity and resilience in supporting children to the point where they could and would access services through the universal routes.

However, had partners been present in the YJS, the children could have accessed the services quicker, more effectively, and with greater positive impact. For YJS practitioners, the levels of preparation involved in maintaining children's motivation and obtaining appropriate support in the absence of embedded partnership work, contributed to unnecessary workload pressures, and often impacted upon what could be achieved in the time available.

Case managers considered community integration well. They took opportunities to find local and affordable services that would interest the children and support them to cease associating with people that they had offended with.

Work to effectively support the safety of other people was delivered consistently well and again practitioner used a range of interventions and resources to achieve this.

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

3.4. Out-of-court disposal policy and provision



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

Requires improvement

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 procedure for out-of-court disposals was reviewed 18 months ago. New initiatives to deter children from offending have been added to the suite of prevention activities, including Turnaround and Second Chance.
- The quality of delivery in out-of-court disposals was of a consistently high quality across assessment, planning and delivery.
- Systems and processes are designed to deter children from offending at the earliest opportunity. We found effective use of community-based interventions to provide children with positive and purposeful activities.
- The out-of-court disposal panel meets fortnightly and allocates assessments. It also gathers information on whether social care is already involved with the family. It was positive to see that the victim worker is part of the panel to give advice and ensure victims' voices are heard.
- There is a separate prevention panel that aims to prevent children from being drawn into an out-of-court disposal. Some children may be heard at both panels over time, depending on the incident.
- Arrangements are in place for the panel to make referrals to the MASH in Conwy. However, due to the lack of social care on the panel, this relies on the YJS making the decision, rather than the panel being advised by social care.

Areas for improvement:

- There are sometimes avoidable delays in investigating offences committed by children. This leads to long delays in the out-of-court disposal panel process. The YJS police officer will follow the case up with the community police when this occurs, but we saw delays running into months in cases we inspected. For example, in one case there was a 12-month delay in the investigation, before the case was referred to the YJS. In three other cases, the delays were between four and five months.
- There is no social care representative from Conwy or Denbighshire on the panels. This is a missed opportunity to provide support at the earliest stage.
- There is limited training for those on the panel on child criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation or safeguarding. This limits the panel's ability to identify behaviours that can indicate children are being exploited.
- Relevant information to support decision-making in assessments was used in just over half of the cases assessed. The lack of information on health needs was a significant gap.

- The same partnership issues that exist for children on statutory orders apply to children on out-of-court disposals. Interventions proposed by case managers are not always achieved because of delays in referrals.
- The police officer is committed to prevention work and has delivered knife crime prevention work in schools. The YJS needs to consider providing additional support for prevention work to enable the police officer to concentrate on their core function as a seconded officer with the YJS.
- There is insufficient strategic scrutiny of out-of-court disposals work. The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner has been asked to provide some scrutiny of decision-making and to provide the panel with assurance and feedback.
- The board does not know if the YJS's prevention services contribute to reducing first-time entrant rates. The YJS's analysis shows a reoffending rate of 18 per cent for out-of-court disposals, but this figure is based only on children who engaged with interventions. Further analysis is needed to understand the experience and outcomes for children who are in the prevention and out-of-court disposal space.

4.1. Resettlement

4.1. Resettlement policy and provision

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

This standard was not rated

We inspected the quality of policy and provision in place for resettlement work, using evidence from documents, meetings and interviews. There were no resettlement cases for us to inspect. As a result, we have not rated this standard, as we were unable to test the policy and provision. Instead, we have provided a description of the factors that we considered. Our key findings were as follows.

Strengths:

- The YJS had developed an evidence-based resettlement policy covering the period 2023-2026. This set out the actions needed to support the child during custody and to prepare them for release into the community.
- A range of guidance documents are included in the policy, providing staff with a single point of reference.
- Arrangements set out how to carry out joint work with social care to safeguard the child. Similarly, the YJS is expected to use complex case forums and high-risk panels.
- The policy sets out how to gather and use information on the child's diverse needs as part of assessment and planning, including how the child perceives their identity.

Areas for improvement:

- There were no current resettlement cases for us to test the effectiveness of the resettlement policy. While we were confident that YJS staff would work hard to do the best they could, the lack of effective partnership work provides little confidence that partners will prioritise the needs of children preparing for release from custody.
- We also found that accommodation for children was a particular challenge. Vulnerable children were placed in unsuitable bed and breakfast placements where adult offenders were also placed. This caused us concern about what would happen if there was a child who needed to be found accommodation for release and resettlement purposes.

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.](#)