

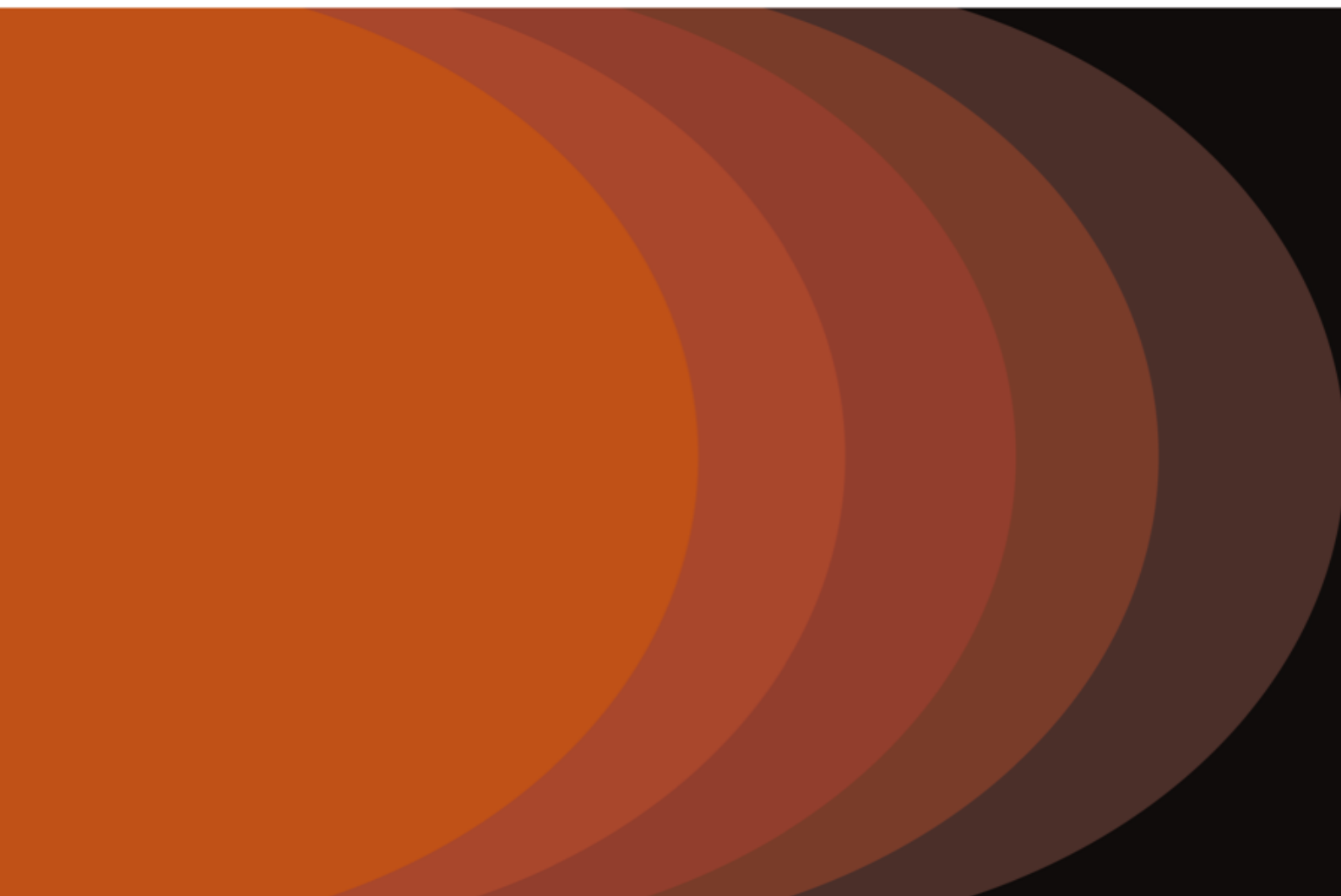


HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of youth justice services in

Islington

HM Inspectorate of Probation, August 2024



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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 individuals’ identity.

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Foreword

This inspection is part of our programme of youth justice service (YJS) inspections. We have inspected and rated Islington 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, Islington YJS was rated 'Outstanding'. We also inspected the quality of resettlement policy and provision, which was separately rated as 'Outstanding'.

The YJS has worked hard since our last inspection in 2016 and there have been significant improvements to service delivery. The YJS is supported by a strong and committed partnership, who understand its vision and strategy as well as the needs of the children, parents, carers, and victims who access it. The tenacious and innovative approach of the YJS and investment from the partnership have enabled YJS children to access a wide range of services and specialist provision to meet their needs. This includes an impressive health offer, whereby children have quick access to key services, such as speech and language therapy and physical and mental health services.

Senior leaders who oversee the YJS are knowledgeable and passionate. They have a strong strategic steer and an operational presence, which helps staff to provide high-quality services. There is a culture of care and support, which extends from managers to staff. This includes a comprehensive supervision offer, and staff can access clinical and reflective group supervision, in addition to one-to-one supervision with their manager. Staff are motivated and feel valued by the service. Their hard work is acknowledged and rewarded.

There is an impressive approach to meeting the diverse needs of children, parents, carers, and victims. The quality of this work was consistently high in the cases we reviewed. Extensive research, evaluation and consultation with stakeholders, staff, children, parents, and carers have given the service a detailed understanding of disproportionality in the local area. The service has used this effectively to develop a comprehensive strategy to address the over-representation of particular groups in the YJS.

The out-of-court-disposal diversion offer could be improved further through the use of Outcome 22. The YJS has raised and escalated this with police partners, and recognise that not having Outcome 22 as an option for the out-of-court panel limits the opportunities to divert children from the criminal justice system. The YJS is using Outcome 20¹, allowing children to be diverted, receive intervention and support.

The YJS are dedicated to learning and improving. The service routinely carries out detailed analysis, quality assurance of practice, and evaluation to understand its impact, areas of strength and areas requiring development. This has been used this to shape delivery, identify learning and development, and improve provision. The service also draws on relevant research, learning from the sector, inspections, and serious case reviews. This approach has supported and enabled high-quality services for those accessing the YJS.



Martin Jones CBE
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

¹ Action undertaken by another body/agency (from April 2015): Further action resulting from the crime report will be undertaken by another body or agency other than the police.

Ratings

Islington Youth Justice Service
Fieldwork started May 2024

Score

34/36

Overall rating

Outstanding



1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Governance and leadership

Outstanding



1.2 Staff

Outstanding



1.3 Partnerships and services

Outstanding



1.4 Information and facilities

Outstanding



2. Court disposals

2.1 Assessment

Outstanding



2.2 Planning

Outstanding



2.3 Implementation and delivery

Outstanding



2.4 Reviewing

Outstanding



3. Out-of-court disposals

3.1 Assessment

Good



3.2 Planning

Outstanding



3.3 Implementation and delivery

Outstanding



3.4 Out-of-court disposal policy and provision

Good



4. Resettlement²

4.1 Resettlement policy and provision

Outstanding



² The rating for resettlement does not influence the overall YJS rating.

Recommendations

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

The Islington Youth Justice Service should:

1. work with police and probation partners to improve its offer for victims. This includes increasing victim consent rates and ensuring the statutory role and remit of probation victim liaison services is understood and embedded.
2. continue work with the partnership to review and improve education experiences and outcomes for children under 16 years of age.

The Metropolitan Police should:

3. review the use of Outcome 22 in Islington and work with the YJS to embed this as part of the diversion offer.

The out-of-court-disposal external scrutiny panel should:

4. include information on protected characteristics when reviewing out-of-court disposal decisions. This will enable the panel to identify the impact of diversity and disproportionality in decision-making.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Islington YJS over a period of a week, beginning on 20 May 2024. We inspected cases where the sentence or licence, out-of-court disposal or resettlement provision began between 22 May 2023 and 15 March 2024. We also conducted interviews in all cases, 14 with case managers and four with either a manager or substitute in the absence of the case manager.

Islington is the second smallest borough in inner London, but it is densely populated. In November 2023, the Office for National Statistics recorded the total population at 220,373, of which seven per cent (15,481) were children aged 10 to 17 years. The southern section of Islington sits next to the City of London, but it is bordered by several boroughs, including Camden, Hackney, and Haringey. Although there are many affluent areas within Islington, the borough experiences significant challenges with poverty and deprivation. Islington is a richly diverse area. The YJS has identified that 57 per cent of children are from a Black, Asian and minority ethnic heritage. At the time of the inspection, 68 per cent of the YJS cohort were from these heritages, which means that these children are over-represented. The YJS is aware of this, and has developed a comprehensive, evidence-based strategy to address disproportionality.

Islington YJS is part of the Children and Young People Directorate, sitting within Young Islington. The director for Young Islington is also responsible for the violence against women and girls portfolio, youth safety commissioning, play and youth commissioning and youth hubs services and leads on equalities and mental health for children's services. The assistant director oversees the YJS, Targeted Youth Support (TYS) and Islington Collaboration Action Network (I-CAN, formally known as the integrated gangs team). The YJS has strong strategic and operational connections with TYS and I-CAN. Not only can YJS children access their services, TYS provides the triage (Outcome 20) element of the out-of-court disposals, and the resettlement worker is located in I-CAN. The YJS management structure includes a service manager, deputy service manager, YJS team manager, and deputy team managers. The wider team includes YJS workers, a restorative justice worker, and a referral order and volunteer coordinator. There are a number of specialist workers, including a physical health nurse, educational psychologist, speech and language therapist, youth counselling and substance misuse worker, probation officer, police officers, senior CAMHS specialist nurse, liaison and diversion nurse, Youth Engagement Service employment coach, post-16 progression adviser, prevention and specialist projects officer and a YJS forensic psychologist.

The YJS works primarily with boys aged 15 to 17 years, but there has been an increase in the number of girls accessing out-of-court disposals. In the period of inspection, 21 per cent of the YJS cohort were girls, compared with six per cent 12 months previously. The YJS has proactively analysed the reasons for this increase and used this to inform its approach to working with girls.

In our domain two case sample, violence against the person made up 25 per cent of the sample and accounted for 50 per cent of the domain three sample. Four of the eight domain two cases and two of the domain three cases featured a knife. At the time of inspection, 32 per cent of the YJS children were being cared for by the local authority, 18 per cent were open on child protection and another 18 per cent were working with CSC on child in need plans.

The Metropolitan Police service covers the Islington area. The YJS and police have an effective longstanding and collaborative relationship. There is a clear commitment to supporting the YJS to deliver a child-centred and trauma-informed approach.

Domain one: Organisational delivery

To inspect organisational delivery, we reviewed written evidence submitted in advance by the YJS and conducted 15 meetings, including with staff, volunteers, managers, board members, and partnership staff and their managers.

Key findings about organisational delivery were as follows.

1.1. Governance and leadership



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

Outstanding

Strengths:

- The assistant director for the YJS, TYS and I-CAN and the Director of Young Islington, who oversee and lead on YJS provision, are knowledgeable and passionate. Both are well respected and held in high regard by the partnership and service. They have a strong strategic and operational presence, which has given them a detailed understanding of practice and enabled them to implement the service's vision effectively.
- The vision and strategy were developed in collaboration with the wider service and partnership. Their priorities, aspirations, and values are understood at both strategic and operational levels. A child-centred and trauma-informed approach is fully embedded in the service's practice.
- The management board includes partners of appropriate seniority who attend consistently. The chair and board members are invested in the YJS's work. They understand their roles and responsibilities, and the needs of the service and the children, parents, carers, and victims who access it.
- The YJS and board have effective strategic relationships with other boards and services. There is a clear alignment with other relevant Islington strategies. This has promoted collaborative working across the partnership, raised the YJS's profile and improved provision for the YJS, children, parents, carers, and victims.
- Services to meet YJS children's health needs are impressive. Children have swift and direct access to a wide range of provision, including forensic child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), a physical health nurse, sexual health services, speech and language therapy, educational psychology, youth counselling and substance and alcohol misuse services.
- Effective relationships and arrangements with strategic partners have enabled YJS children, parents, and carers to access a wide range of high-quality services and provision to meet their needs. This includes in-house staff from the police and education services.
- Securing a seconded probation practitioner has been challenging, due to staffing and resource difficulties within the probation service. However, both services have been proactive and developed an innovative solution to resource a probation practitioner.

The management board needs to continue to monitor this arrangement to ensure this resource is maintained.

- There is strong connectivity between the board, senior managers and the YJS. Board members have observed and been involved in practice and YJS staff regularly attend the board. This has helped the wider service to understand the vision and strategy and role of the board. Staff have confidence in the board's ability to govern and support the service.
- The management team are cohesive and impressive. They are experienced and knowledgeable, providing a high level of support to staff. Communication is effective and lines of accountability are understood.
- The YJS and board have a comprehensive understanding of the risks to the service. There are plans in place to work collectively and proactively to mitigate and address these.

Areas for improvement:

- Further work with police partners is needed to explore and improve victim consent rates. This will enable the YJS to contact and work with more victims. The statutory role and remit of the probation victim liaison officer needs further clarification and embedding.
- Meeting YJS children's education, training, and employment (ETE) needs is a partnership priority. The partnership has taken proactive approaches to improving outcomes, including reducing school exclusions. However, at the time of the inspection, high numbers of children under 16 were accessing alternative education provision. The YJS has recognised this but needs to continue working with the partnership to explore and improve in this area.

1.2. Staff



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

Outstanding

Strengths:

- YJS staff at all levels are passionate, dedicated and invested in the children, parents, carers, and victims they work with. The YJS environment and culture ensure that staff feel valued, engaged with the service and highly motivated.
- Operational and strategic workloads are demanding but manageable. Staff levels are appropriate, which has enabled the YJS to provide high-quality services for children parents and carers.
- There is a considered approach to allocating cases. Managers proactively consider the child's diversity, and the practitioner's skills and workload. This makes sure children are matched to practitioners with appropriate knowledge and experience.
- There is a comprehensive supervision offer. This provides excellent support for staff and promotes high-quality practice, which was evident in the cases we reviewed. The offer includes frequent supervision between staff and managers, monthly clinical supervision, reflective group case supervision (involving specialists) and joint supervision with services working with the child, parents, and carers.
- There is a structured and thorough induction process for new staff and those moving to different roles within the service. This includes mandatory training, increased supervision, and experiential learning.
- The service promotes and values a culture of continuous learning. There is an expansive training offer that provides staff with regular opportunities to develop. Research, analysis and learning from evaluation are used to identify necessary training.
- The YJS invests in its staff. It gives them opportunities to gain informal and formal qualifications, such as social work degrees and apprenticeships. A number of staff have been promoted to management roles within the service and have received appropriate training to support this transition.
- The work and achievements of the YJS, individual staff members, and peer advocates is acknowledged and rewarded through feedback and formal award ceremonies.
- Volunteers are motivated and enjoy their role. They feel that they are part of the YJS team and that the service values their work. There is a comprehensive induction process that equips volunteers for their role.
- The safety of staff is a priority. The YJS is proactive and responsive, ensuring that processes, support, and mechanisms are in place to maintain and promote physical and emotional safety.

Areas for improvement:

- The supervision and oversight processes for volunteers need to be strengthened. While volunteers feel supported, more structure, clarity on lines of accountability and increased opportunities for individual supervision would improve oversight and help to develop volunteers.

1.3. Partnerships and services



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

Outstanding

Strengths:

- The YJS routinely produces a comprehensive and detailed analysis of performance, desistance factors and key demographics of children known to the service. It proactively identifies trends and patterns, which triggers further analysis and evaluation. This enables an in-depth understanding of impact and analysis which the service has effectively used to shape and improve service delivery. This information is consistently disseminated to the board, key partners, and the wider service, so that they are well informed. As well as receiving data and analysis from partners to inform their own evaluation, the YJS has been able to contribute to wider analysis of issues affecting Islington.
- The YJS and children's social care (CSC) have effective strategic and operational relationships, which supported high-quality practice in the cases we reviewed. The roles and responsibilities of each service were understood, and joint work was coordinated and aligned. This ensured a collaborative approach.
- The impressive health offer gives YJS children quick access to a range of in-house specialist services, including provision for speech, language, and communication, educational psychology, substance misuse, youth counselling, forensic CAMHS and physical health. Specialist and clinical interventions are overseen by a panel that reviews and manages provision, ensuring that children's needs are being met effectively.
- Commissioned arrangements and in-house interventions give children access to a range of provision that encourages community integration, builds on desistance, and supports protective factors.
- There is a strong prevention and universal offer for children. Proactive services are in place that aim to help children avoid contact with the justice system. The YJS has access to these services to support the children they are working with. Staff also use these to step down work once the YJS intervention is completed.
- The partnership has recognised the challenges that YJS children can experience in securing and maintaining ETE. Improving ETE outcomes is a priority for the YJS. Children have access to services and support, including learning and training opportunities. The partnership recognises that more work is needed to improve this further.
- Numerous support and intervention packages are available for parents and carers. These are delivered by trained parents (called parent champions) with lived experience, who provide impressive peer support and learning.
- YJS children can access numerous reparation projects that enable them to develop skills and knowledge, while making reparation to the community. The YJS is currently organising formal qualifications for children who have completed a reparation project.
- Arrangements for keeping the child and other people safe are robust and effective. Partners are invested in working with the YJS to promote safety. The commitment of multiple agencies has ensured that staff have daily access to live information,

professionals attend meetings regularly, and effective panels are convened to monitor and review safety.

- There is a coordinated and robust approach to supporting children who are at risk of exploitation. Partnership arrangements provide wraparound support to promote children's safety. Islington is part of a devolved decision-making process for the national referral mechanism (NRM), and this is helping to achieve positive outcomes for children.
- The YJS is passionate and committed to restorative justice, ensuring that victims have a voice, and that their needs are met. The offer is victim-led, allowing a choice of support and involvement with the YJS. This includes victims having the opportunity to contribute to risk and safety planning.

Areas for improvement:

- Despite the wide range of reparation projects available, inspectors found that these were not always being used effectively in some of the cases we reviewed, and the activities were not always sufficiently restorative.

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 has produced comprehensive policies that provide clear guidance and detail on all key areas of practice. These are reviewed regularly to ensure that the guidance is up-to-date and relevant. Policies are stored in a central location and communicated clearly to staff. Processes are well embedded and understood.
- Children are seen at the YJS office, community venues and through home visits. Staff make it a priority to see the children in environments where they feel comfortable. Children and practitioners' safety is considered. The facilities available provide spaces where confidential and sensitive work can be carried out.
- The YJS is currently redeveloping the rooms where children are seen and the outside space at its offices. Children have been consulted on the redesign and have contributed to the plans around décor, furniture, equipment, and lighting. Children who work with the YJS also have access to snacks and drinks. The aim is to provide a child-friendly and comfortable environment that promotes engagement.
- The service's ICT packages and case management systems support service delivery. This includes the ability to produce detailed information and reports on performance. ICT systems support agile working and staff can work remotely from other offices or community venues.
- Effective relationships with partners and agreed information-sharing protocols give staff quick access to information that supports their work with children, parents, and carers.
- The quality assurance framework and management oversight processes are comprehensive and robust. This has supported high-quality practice. Audits are carried out frequently and have included partners and other youth justice services. The YJS uses the findings to identify areas of strength, and trigger learning and development to improve services.
- The YJS and partners extensively and frequently evaluate their practice and provision. This gives them a detailed awareness and understanding of patterns and trends, the impact of services, and areas requiring improvement. These evaluations have shaped and improved service delivery.
- The YJS is committed to learning, development and improving practice. They proactively draw on learning from inspections, research, serious case incidents and the youth justice sector. It then uses this learning to inform strategies, training, policies, and protocols.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

The YJS's approach to child, parent and carer participation is impressive. Their voices and feedback are central to the operational and strategic approach of the YJS. There is a genuine commitment to understanding the lived experience of children, parents, and carers and using this to shape service delivery and improve outcomes for children. The YJS routinely and proactively seeks the views of children, parents, and carers and uses these to analyse, review and improve its effectiveness. This includes providing numerous platforms to capture their views, such as through attendance at the management board. The YJS has incorporated their feedback into the service strategy and has taken action to ensure their views have impact. This includes consulting with children, parents, and carers on the service's vision and strategy, interventions and services, and redesign of YJS facilities. Their innovative approach has provided regular opportunities for children, parents, and carers to be actively involved and influence the YJS and partnership. This includes employed peer advocates with lived experience and working with parent champions. Both attend a variety of forums to represent children, parents, and carers and directly contribute to key areas of delivery, such as the training of new police recruits.

The YJS contacted, on our behalf, children, families, and carers who had worked with the service to gain their consent for an interview or text survey. We spoke to six children and two parents. We also had seven responses to our text survey. It was evident that both children, families and carers valued the service they had received, and the responses were overwhelmingly positive. In the text survey, participants were asked to rate the YJS on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being 'poor' and 10 being 'fantastic'. All seven respondents rated the service eight or above, with three giving it a 10. Those who participated in the inspection described communication from the YJS as a strength. They said the service not only provided clear, understandable information but also took the time to listen to them.

One child commented:

"My worker listens well and gives me space to talk. I think they know how to connect with young people. They don't judge me, and it feels like they are in my corner, helping me. My worker is interested in me and gets to know me."

One parent said:

"I feel like I can trust the YJS. They have supported my son a lot and always keep me informed. If I have any questions, they will answer them for me."

All the participants felt that their worker had the right skills to undertake the role and had provided access to services that would help them/their child. One parent commented:

"It was so helpful to see the kind and supportive approach from a service who you have never met before. My son's worker was brilliant. I cannot say enough about her. She understood my son's neurodevelopmental needs and supported him in the right way. I felt really comforted that such an understanding worker was involved with my son."

When asked 'how good are the services received?', all participants gave the top rating of 'very good'. One child said:

"My YJS worker has spent time talking to me about decisions and choices. She has supported me to be a better person and get my life on track. I have had help from the Careers worker who has helped me write out my CV and I've now applied for college and jobs."

Diversity

- The YJS and partnership approach to meeting diverse needs is fully established in practice and highly impressive, in particular their strategy and vision to address disproportionality. There is clear commitment to anti-racist practice, and to reducing the numbers of cared for children and children with neurodiverse needs who are in contact with the youth justice service. The YJS has undertaken and used extensive research and analysis to inform its strategy. This has ensured that it is relevant and addresses areas requiring systemic change.
- The partnership is invested in and proactively supporting the service. For example, the YJS and police provide training for new police recruits, and the YJS is involved in reviewing and monitoring stop and search activity. While the partnership recognises that this work needs to continue, the YJS has already seen positive tangible outcomes for children who are over-represented in the YJS cohort.
- Staff from Black, Asian and minority ethnic heritage have been able to access specific training and formal leadership qualifications, with a view to supporting them in their development and increasing diversity at operational and senior management levels.
- Volunteers and the majority of staff feel that the YJS has recognised and considered their diversity needs and, where required, made adjustments.
- The YJS has a diverse team, but this does not fully reflect the cohort of children, parents, and carers they work with, or the local population, in terms of ethnicity and gender. The YJS has recognised this and as part of its disproportionality strategy will now take a targeted approach to future recruitment. The higher number of female practitioners does give girls the opportunity to work with case managers of the same gender.
- The YJS recognised that its cohort of volunteers did not fully represent the children parents, and carers they work with. Proactive recruitment has now ensured a more diverse volunteer team.
- The YJS actively and frequently analyses diversity and protected characteristics. This has helped it to identify and have a live understanding of disproportionality within the YJS cohort. The service has used this analysis effectively to inform and tailor its response to addressing disproportionality.
- YJS staff have tailored their provision to ensure children have access to a wide range of interventions to meet and celebrate their diverse needs. These include bespoke mentoring services and interventions to build on desistance, such as leadership programmes.
- The YJS has taken a detailed, evidence-based approach to developing policies and procedures on diversity and disproportionality. This included input from partners, staff, children, parents, and carers. Guidance sets out how the service intends to meet the protected characteristics of those they work with. Local disproportionality is understood, with policies specifying the services' response and planned actions to tackle this. This supported high-quality diversity practice within the service.

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.

Outstanding

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

Does assessment sufficiently analyse:	% 'Yes'
how to support the child's desistance?	100%
how to keep the child safe?	88%
how to keep other people safe?	100%

Assessment of desistance was of a consistently high quality in all cases. Analysis was comprehensive and provided a balanced insight into the child's behaviour, personal circumstances, strengths, and areas of concern. Practitioners were skilled at recognising the child's individuality and diverse needs. In many cases social GRRRAACCEEESSS⁴ were used to provide in-depth exploration of protected characteristics and the child's identity, including culture and heritage. Practitioners were confident and highly capable in having sensitive conversations exploring racism, discrimination, and potentially difficult experiences such as stop and search by the police. Analysis of diversity considered impact. Inspectors were impressed by practitioners' understanding of neurodiversity and consideration of whether they needed to make reasonable adjustments to support engagement.

The views of children, parents, and carers were seen as integral to assessments. Practitioners used these effectively to understand the child's lived experience, triggers to behaviours, and future aspirations. Practitioners had recognised the importance of gaining the child's perspective on potential risks to and from them and using this to inform assessment.

Practitioners had proactively gathered information from other services, including specialist assessment. They used this, alongside professional judgement, to enhance their analysis of desistance. Through relationships with other key partners, practitioners had access to numerous multi-agency forums and live information on potential risks to and from children. They used this effectively and appropriately in assessment activity to analyse potential harm and likelihood of concerns.

Assessment of both the child's and other people's safety were impressive. Practitioners identified and explored potential adverse outcomes, including the impact of early experiences. This included key areas such as previous trauma, neglect, physical and emotional harm, and exploitation. The impact of being cared for by the local authority and family separation were recognised and carefully considered. While the current offence was analysed to inform assessment of potential harm to others, other known behaviours and

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.](#)

⁴ The term social GRRRAACCEEESSS is an acronym that describes aspects of personal and social identity which afford people different levels of power and privilege.

concerns were appropriately explored. This gave a holistic understanding of risk. Practitioners recognised that, while some behaviours from children were worrying, these also impacted on their own vulnerability and interventions and controls needed to consider both areas. Assessment activity had considered the nature and context of concerns as well the impact and likelihood; this had helped practitioners to make fair judgements and appropriate responses to mitigate concerns.

2.2. Planning



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

Outstanding

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

Does planning focus sufficiently on:	% 'Yes'
supporting the child's desistance?	100%
keeping the child safe?	100%
keeping other people safe?	88%

Planning to meet desistance needs was comprehensive and sequenced to ensure it appropriately prioritised key areas to address concerns and enhance improve protective factors. Plans incorporated referrals and access to in-house and partnership services. These included specialist provision such as ETE support and mentoring services. Planning was strengths-based, with a clear focus on achieving the child's aspirations and goals. This included making sure the child had access to meaningful, constructive activities such sports.

As with assessment, planning to meet the children's diversity needs continued to be a strength. Practitioners had identified further opportunities to explore and understand the child's identity, culture, and heritage. Inspectors found that key protected characteristics, such as gender and religion, were factored into planning as well exploring reasonable adjustments were required. Practitioners used their knowledge of neurodiversity and specialist assessments, such as speech and language and education, health and care plans, to plan their work.

Planning activity was completed in collaboration with the child, parents, and carers. Their views on the support and intervention they needed were fully considered. Practitioners gathered their perspectives on promoting their own safety and the safety of other people. Inspectors found that targets had been co-produced with children. This helped children to understand expectations, and to become invested in the work. Children were also consulted on how sessions and support should be undertaken, including whether they were comfortable with their allocated worker.

Where other services were involved with the child, parents, and carers, inspectors found that communication was strong, and planning activity was coordinated and completed jointly. This included successfully liaising and planning with out-of-area services and the police. Plans were aligned with those of other services, and it was clear which professional would be carrying out key pieces of work to avoid duplication. Attendance at and contributions to multi-agency forums and joint supervision with other services, such as CSC, had supported effective planning activity. This enabled services to take a collaborative approach to meeting children's desistance needs and promoting their safety and that of others.

In almost all cases, practitioners had considered interventions and necessary controls to mitigate risks to and from the child. This included referrals to specialist services such as CSC, CAMHS and I-CAN. Where there were concerns about potential exploitation, inspectors found

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.](#)

that the planned partnership response had promoted the child's safety. This included ensuring children were referred to relevant forums so that concerns could be discussed and monitored, and where appropriate using the NRM.

The needs, wishes and safety of victims was a priority in planning activity. In almost all relevant cases, the practitioner had fully considered these. Where there were actual and potential victims, planning had included external controls such as non-contact. Necessary work to promote safety, including restorative justice was also incorporated into plans.

Contingency planning was of high quality in both keeping the child and other people safe. Practitioners tailored contingency arrangements to the child and potential concerns. They also set out the appropriate action and responses to take if the risks changed. This included the roles of other services as well as the YJS.

2.3. Implementation and delivery



High-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child.	Outstanding
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Our rating⁶ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

Does the implementation and delivery of services:	% 'Yes'
effectively support the child's desistance?	88%
effectively support the safety of the child?	100%
effectively support the safety of other people?	88%

Plans to meet children's diversity needs had been implemented effectively in intervention. This included reasonable adjustments that had considered the child's neurodiversity and communication needs. For example, practitioners had used guidance from speech, language and communication assessments and tailored sessions. Personal circumstances, such as family time, were also prioritised, with sessions being scheduled to accommodate this. In several cases, practitioners supported children through work and provision that celebrated diversity and explored identity, including the use of mentors and the Ether programme.

Practitioners understood the value of developing meaningful relationships with children, parents, and carers. This had facilitated engagement and supported children to complete work. Practitioners carried out work to tackle areas of concern, such as substance misuse, peer relationships and interventions to develop internal controls. However, there was also a strong focus on enhancing protective factors and strengths. This included advocating for children's ETE provision and promoting access to constructive activities.

In the cases we reviewed, there was a high level of professional support and input. Representatives from the services involved with the child, parents, and carers consistently attended risk management forums and multi-agency meetings and directly contributed to delivery. Communication between the professional network was proactive and frequent. This meant that YJS had access to live information and were able to share updates quickly. Where there had been changes to a child's risks and concerns, such as periods of going missing, the professional response was effective. Tenacious efforts were made to locate children and take action to promote their safety.

Specialist services and provision had been used well. This included case formulation sessions for individual children, which gave practitioners guidance and specialist support for complex cases. Where required, children had received quick access to CAMHS and neurodiversity pathways.

We found a holistic approach to safety management, where support and interventions were offered to the child, parents, and carers. This included meaningful consultation, as well as direct interventions. This had enabled children, parents, and carers to feel involved and supported. When appropriate, practitioners used external controls such as exclusion zones. They also carried out bespoke pieces of work, such as emotional regulation and weapons awareness.

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.](#)

Inspectors judged management oversight to be sufficient in the majority of cases. Practical and valuable guidance was provided to case managers, which supported high-quality work. Oversight was enhanced through managers attending risk management forums and through joint supervision with other services working with the child. This was particularly evident in cases where children were open to CSC. Joint supervision had enabled the services to take a coordinated and collaborative approach to supporting safety.

2.4. Reviewing



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

Outstanding

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

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on:	% 'Yes'
supporting the child's desistance?	100%
keeping the child safe?	100%
keeping other people safe?	88%

Inspectors found reviewing activity to be an ongoing process, whereby practitioners routinely monitored progress and ensured that targets remained realistic and achievable. In all cases, practitioners completed formal written reviews and recorded and analysed changes to desistance, and the safety of the child and other people. Where required, the practitioners also considered the child's diversity needs and personal circumstances as part of the reviewing activity. This included exploring whether the style of delivery was appropriate and whether reasonable adjustments were helping the child to engage. Where children were coming to the end of their involvement with the service, exit strategies were considered early. The YJS proactively liaised with services and provisions to make sure support would be in place when the child's work with the YJS had ended.

Children, parents, and carers were meaningfully involved in reviewing. Practitioners recognised that their views were critical to understanding the progress and impact of the work undertaken. In their reviews, practitioners acknowledged and rewarded children for their achievements, and gave feedback and praise. However, they also explored barriers and challenges, and used strategies to address these. For instance, they worked with education providers to support the child's access to and engagement with education.

Reviewing activity was supported by multi-agency meetings and risk management forums. The YJS and other services working with the child attended these consistently. This enabled regular information-sharing and reviewing of risks and made sure that current measures and support were promoting safety. There was a sense of shared ownership from services, with healthy discussions; where services challenged each other to make sure that provision fully met the child's needs and that risks were being managed.

Where there had been changes to the safety of the child or others, the partnership mobilised quickly to review concerns and devise actions to mitigate risks. Practitioners exercised effective professional curiosity to understand changes. For instance, if a child disengaged, the practitioner explored wider issues such as extra familial harm, rather than simply focusing on the child's motivation.

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.](#)

Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

We inspected eight cases managed by the YJS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of five youth conditional cautions, one youth caution and two triage (outcome 20) disposals. We interviewed the case managers in eight cases.

3.1. Assessment



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

Good

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

Does assessment sufficiently analyse:	% 'Yes'
how to support the child's desistance?	88%
how to keep the child safe?	88%
how to keep other people safe?	75%

Assessment of desistance was detailed and analytical. Practitioners were skilled at identifying concerns, areas of strength and protective factors, and exploring these comprehensively. This gave a clear understanding of areas that required direct intervention and support, such as education, relationships, and substance misuse.

Assessment of diversity and personal circumstances was effective in almost all cases. Practitioners had taken time to explore the child's individual needs as well as to consider key protected characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, and heritage. They used screening tools for mental health and speech, language, and communication needs to improve their assessment activity and to also identify whether these areas needed to be explored further with specialists.

As with the cases we reviewed in domain two, practitioners proactively sought information from other services and used it to inform their analysis of desistance and risks to and from children. Children, parents, and carers were meaningfully involved in the process. Their views were captured and analysed in assessment activity and reports for the decision-making panel. Practitioners actively discussed risk and safety concerns with children, parents, and carers. Not only did this enhance the analysis, it enabled them to feel involved and their perspectives to be acknowledged.

Overall, analysis of risks to and from children was impressive. Practitioners recognised potential adverse outcomes, such as emotional harm, and also fully explored individual causes, such as trauma, domestic abuse and family separation. This ensured that assessments were individual to the child. Most assessments of potential harm to others had scrutinised the nature and context of the harm. They gave a detailed account of the factors that could increase risk, and the circumstances in which these were likely to occur, considering elements such as peer influence, and emotional and internal controls.

In the two cases where assessment of safety to others was deemed to be insufficient, analysis had not fully considered all possible risks and there needed to be more exploration of potential victims. This included further consideration of impact, imminence, and likelihood of the risks.

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

3.2. Planning



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

Outstanding

Our rating⁹ for planning is based on the following key questions:

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

Planning activity was thorough and robust. Practitioners identified key areas of desistance that required intervention, including education and substance misuse. Planning set out detailed intervention and support that would further enhance desistance, such as access to constructive activities. There was a clear focus on community integration and enabling children to access mainstream provision such as sports. Practitioners recognised the importance of securing and maintaining appropriate ETE, and planning made use of the specialist services available, such as the educational psychologist. Where ETE provision was not fully meeting the child's needs, there were clear actions to advocate, challenge and support children, and placements to improve provision.

Planning had considered the child's diversity needs and personal circumstances. This included appropriate flexibility with appointments so that children were able to attend ETE and constructive activities. Practitioners had carefully considered how sessions should be delivered and what reasonable adjustments might be required. This included using recommendations from specialist assessments, such as speech, language and communication reports.

At the initial planning stage, practitioners actively explored whether step down processes and exit strategies would be needed once the child's work with the YJS ended. This was critical, given the shorter timeframe of out-of-court disposals. In the cases where these were required, early planning had enabled other services to become involved sooner, with effective handovers taking place.

Planning to address risks to the child and others had not only involved other professionals working with the child, parents, and carers, but also included referrals to services where there was a need for their intervention. This included referrals to CSC, CAMHS, NRM and exploitation provision. Planning activity had ensured that the professional network understood concerns, identified appropriate interventions, and considered who would be leading on specific pieces of work.

Victims' wishes and views had been considered in all cases and, where relevant, incorporated into plans. Where inspectors assessed there to be potential and actual victims, planning had identified appropriate measures and responses to promote safety. These included ensuring, where required, that other services, such as CSC, were aware of possible victims and had contributed to planning activity.

As with the domain two cases, contingency planning for both keeping the child and other people safe was a strength. Contingency arrangements were tailored to the child, identifying appropriate responses and the roles of other services should risks change.

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

3.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Outstanding

Our rating¹⁰ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

Does service delivery effectively support:	% 'Yes'
the child's desistance?	100%
the safety of the child?	88%
the safety of other people?	100%

Practitioners developed positive working relationships with children. They took the time to get to know the child, and to establish the boundaries and expectations of the support and intervention. They recognised the value of a holistic approach and involving parents, and carers in the disposal. This included offering direct support and intervention to parents and carers, as well as making regular contact and completing home visits. It was evident that this approach had facilitated engagement.

Intervention was sequenced and proportionate. Practitioners had prioritised intervention effectively, ensuring that it targeted areas of concern and aimed to build resilience and protective factors. Step down and exit strategies were in place before the end of the disposal, offering children, parents, and carers support after the child's work with the YJS ended.

Responses to children's diversity and personal circumstances continued to be of high quality. Work on identity, culture, and heritage, as well to explore discrimination, was completed in a sensitive and supportive manner. This gave children a safe space to discuss their experiences and explore their individuality. A range of innovative and interactive sessions were delivered that promoted their engagement and understanding.

In the cases we reviewed, where assessments had identified potential neurodiversity, emotional or mental health needs, children had quick access to specialist services, including speech, language, and communication therapy and CAMHS. Inspectors found impressive support from these specialists. For instance, where children had additional communication needs, specialist reports were shared with professionals working with the child and direct support offered to education providers to embed recommendations.

For both keeping the child and other people safe, inspectors found strong partnership working and effective communication across the professional network. The established risk management protocols and forums had allowed quick access to information and enabled partners to take an active role in overseeing safety. It was evident that other services understood their roles and that risk management was a shared responsibility.

Where inspectors assessed that there were potential and actual victims, implementation had prioritised their safety and ensured appropriate mechanisms were in place to monitor and address concerns. This included bespoke victim awareness sessions delivered by both the restorative justice worker and practitioners. This ensured that the content was relevant, impactful, and accessible to the child. In all cases, key interventions had been undertaken to mitigate concerns. These included sessions on emotional regulation, resilience, relationships, and conflict management.

¹⁰ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available 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.

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 YJS has produced comprehensive guidance that clearly details out-of-court disposal processes, eligibility criteria and minimum expectations for practice. Protocols have been agreed with police partners and are embedded and understood by the partnership.
- The policy and wider guidance articulate how the service intends to take account of children's protected characteristics. There is detail on the disproportionality experienced within the YJS cohort and how this should be considered when delivering out-of-court disposals. It was evident that this is being implemented in practice.
- Out-of-court disposal processes are thorough and robust. Decisions are informed by pre-assessments, which include the child, parents, and carers perspectives and, where relevant, victims' views.
- Out-of-court disposal decisions are made jointly between the YJS and police. They are supported and informed by a multi-agency panel, which includes members from targeted youth support, CSC, the missing and exploitation team, liaison and diversion, restorative justice, youth counselling and the substance misuse service.
- The decision-making panel has a dual role. All cases where the police have issued a community resolution (as a single agency), or children have been released under investigation, made subject to pre-charge bail, or received 'no further action' are reviewed. This enables the panel to consider and offer early intervention, support, and access to services.
- Although not often required, there is an established escalation process should the panel not reach a disposal decision. This enables cases to be reviewed by senior staff within the YJS and police for resolution.
- There are robust processes for ensuring that children eligible for out-of-court disposals, who appear in court, are referred back to the decision-making panel. All out-of-court disposal options are available for these children.
- Outcome 20, known as triage in Islington, is a disposal option available at the panel. This enables children to be diverted from the criminal justice system, and to receive support and intervention, without it being recorded as a formal criminal sanction.
- Children who receive out-of-court disposals have access to the same range of services and interventions available to the YJS. This has given them effective access to support beyond YJS intervention and effective exit planning.
- Evaluation of out-of-court disposal provision is comprehensive and impressive. The YJS frequently analyses and scrutinises practice. This has given it a detailed understanding of its impact. It considers children's views as part of its evaluation activity. Findings are translated effectively into tangible actions, which has improved service delivery.
- Analysis routinely explores diversity and areas of disproportionality. This has allowed the YJS to identify trends and patterns and to monitor areas of over-representation.

It has used this information to tailor provision and interventions to meet children's needs.

Areas for improvement:

- We found some instances where a child's initial engagement with the assessment process affected the outcome they received. For example, if a child was not fully engaged, they appeared less likely to receive an Outcome 20 (triage).
- Outcome 22 is not currently available as a disposal option for the panel. The partnership recognises the value of this disposal and has proactively raised this with the police and Youth Justice Board. The absence of this as a disposal option limits the diversion offer.
- In a small number of inspected cases, inspectors assessed that a triage or youth caution outcome would have been appropriate.
- Out-of-court disposals are reviewed at a multi-agency external scrutiny panel. This provides an opportunity to review decisions and give feedback. However, the panel is not given information on all protected characteristics before reviewing cases. This limits its opportunities to explore whether diversity and disproportionality were fully considered in decision-making.

4.1. Resettlement

4.1. Resettlement policy and provision



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

Outstanding

We inspected the quality of policy and provision in place for resettlement work, using evidence from documents, meetings and interviews. To illustrate that work, we inspected two cases managed by the YJS that had received a custodial sentence. Our key findings were as follows.

Strengths:

- The YJS, in collaboration with its partners, has produced comprehensive guidance for resettlement provision. This provides clear information on how Islington aims to achieve constructive resettlement. The policy has been disseminated effectively to partners and staff, who understand their roles and expectations.
- Practitioners who are involved with resettlement work have received appropriate training for this role. They feel supported by the YJS and partnership and are confident in undertaking this work.
- The partnership has a shared commitment to achieving successful resettlement for children. There are a number of multi-agency panels, which meet frequently. This allows partners to plan and oversee resettlement activity and manage risks to and from children. In the cases we reviewed, the multi-agency approach was integral to promoting safety.
- The partnership is committed to securing the most appropriate accommodation to meet the needs of children leaving custody. In the cases we reviewed, there was a considered approach to planning for accommodation. This had commenced early and took the child's views, needs and potential risks into account, as well as victims' safety.
- The policy advocates for a personalised and strengths-based approach that considers diversity and disproportionality and actively involves the child, parents, and carers. This was reflected in the cases that we inspected, with impressive work to address diversity. Practitioners recognised and responded to individual needs, including understanding the impact of a child's early life experiences and trauma on their presenting behaviour. Where required, children had access to specialist provision and bespoke interventions to meet their needs.
- The dedicated resettlement worker provides additional support to remanded and sentenced children through regular visits, specially developed interventions, advocacy with partner agencies, and liaison with family and carers.
- In the cases we inspected, practitioners were skilled at developing and maintaining positive relationships with children, parents, and carers. Contact from the YJS to children and families was frequent and meaningful, and encouraged them to engage with the disposal.
- The partnership has developed valuable resettlement pathways that enable effective in-reach services for children. In the cases we reviewed, the YJS had successfully coordinated services to ensure that children's health and education needs were met and that they were able to access bespoke provision that promoted constructive resettlement.

- Guidance clearly sets out the expectations for promoting victims' safety. Victim safety was a priority in the cases we reviewed, and victims' views had been appropriately sought and used to inform planning. Risks to potential and known victims were considered, and measures put in place to mitigate concerns and promote safety.
- The YJS and partnership have strong relationships with the secure estates. This enabled coordination and collaborative work between services in the cases we reviewed, including effective communication to promote safety of the child and others.
- The YJS has contributed to the development of London Accommodation Resettlement Pathfinder. The provision is available to Islington and has already been used to provide wraparound and bespoke support to children who require resettlement provision.
- The YJS has completed extensive evaluation of resettlement provision. This is supported by routine analysis, audit activity and deep dive scrutiny of work. Evaluation activity is of high quality and has enabled the YJS to develop and further improve its provision.
- The YJS has recognised that children from black and mixed heritages are over-represented in its remand and custodial cohorts. It uses the findings from analysis and evaluation to understand the children's experiences and put strategies in place to address disproportionality.
- Children, parents, and carers who have received resettlement provision have opportunities to give feedback on their experiences. The YJS has used this feedback to further understand its impact and improve services.

Areas for improvement:

- Further work is needed with the probation service to ensure that where there is a statutory requirement for victim liaison services, these are being provided.

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.](#)