



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of youth justice services in

Cwm Taf

HM Inspectorate of Probation, August 2024



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Foreword

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

Cwm Taf YJS has embedded trauma-informed approaches across all aspects of its work with children and their parents or carers. Practitioners know their children well and take time to understand their lived experiences and individual needs. The YJS leadership team is committed and knowledgeable. Staff and volunteers feel supported and safe in undertaking their work. Operationally, there is a cohesive partnership offer, with the YJS benefiting from secondment and commissioning arrangements with the police, probation, and healthcare providers. We also found several examples of impressive collaboration with children's services. However, the partnership needs to inform its strategic approach in developing the most effective interventions and services for children including improving the way it collates and analyses information and developing a greater understanding of disproportionality and overrepresentation within the YJS cohort. The YJS has a strong preventative offer, and all children have equitable access to services.

For post-court work and resettlement practice, we found consistent high-quality practice in the assessing, planning, and delivery of services, particularly in relation to children's desistance. However, the quality of out-of-court disposal assessing and planning activities needs to improve, with a greater focus on the safety of the child, and of others. Reviewing the format of the bureau decision-making panel may assist with improving out-of-court disposal work.

Child-first principles are an embedded part of YJS practices. However, this was not replicated across the strategic partnership, resulting in a fragmented, and often conflicting, response to addressing children's behaviours. The recently re-established YJS management board needs to ensure that all partners, from across both local authorities, take forward learning from the increase in remands, short-term custodial sentences, and the use of criminal behaviour orders, and utilise this proactively to ensure effective work is delivered with children. The YJS management board must also work with other strategic forums to urgently prioritise the development of a framework relating to child exploitation, to ensure that all services are consistently identifying, screening, and responding to indicators of child exploitation and extra-familial harm. This is particularly pressing in view of the lack of analysis of the high numbers of YJS children not in mainstream schools, alternatively educated, or on part-time timetables.

The YJS management board was reflective and eager to develop its governance responsibilities. We hope that this report, and its recommendations, will support both the management board and the YJS in driving forward the necessary improvements to the delivery of services for children.



Martin Jones CBE
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Cwm Taf Youth Justice Service		Score	19/36
Fieldwork started April 2024			
Overall rating		Good	
1. Organisational delivery			
1.1	Governance and leadership	Requires improvement	
1.2	Staff	Good	
1.3	Partnerships and services	Requires improvement	
1.4	Information and facilities	Good	
2. Court disposals			
2.1	Assessment	Good	
2.2	Planning	Outstanding	
2.3	Implementation and delivery	Outstanding	
2.4	Reviewing	Good	
3. Out-of-court disposals			
3.1	Assessment	Inadequate	
3.2	Planning	Inadequate	
3.3	Implementation and delivery	Good	
3.4	Out-of-court disposal policy and provision	Requires improvement	
4. Resettlement¹			
4.1	Resettlement policy and provision	Good	

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

Recommendations

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

The Youth Justice Service should:

1. review the quality assurance processes for out-of-court disposals, ensuring that all practitioners are supported to identify and analyse factors impacting on the safety of the child and the safety of others
2. review the format of the bureau decision-making panel so that it has the relevant input, from the necessary agencies and professionals, to ensure that the out-of-court disposal meets the needs of the child
3. consistently capture the voices of children and their parents or carers, to inform the reviewing of policies, process, and provision.

The Cwm Taf Youth Justice Service Management Board should:

4. ensure that strategic partners urgently develop an exploitation framework, a screening tool, and a collective understanding of the National Referral Mechanism processes
5. steer the partnership approach to learning from incidents resulting in the increase in remands, short-term custodial sentences, and use of criminal behaviour orders
6. ensure that there are consistent approaches to determining the suitability of criminal behaviour orders across Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf local authorities
7. improve the analysis of partnership information and YJS data, to evaluate how the service is meeting the needs of children, with a particular focus on overrepresentation, disproportionality, and the high number of YJS children not in mainstream education or subject to part-time timetables
8. take responsibility for setting, developing, and reviewing the vision and strategy of the YJS
9. develop connectivity with the YJS team and with children and parents or carers accessing the service.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Cwm Taf Youth Justice Service (YJS) over a period of a week, beginning 29 April 2024. We inspected cases where the sentence or licence began, out-of-court disposals were delivered, and resettlement cases were sentenced or released between 01 May 2023 and 23 February 2024. We also conducted 26 interviews with case managers or their line managers.

Cwm Taf Youth Offending Service (YOS) was formed in 2014 following the amalgamation of YOS's in Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT). Between 2017 and March 2023, the YOS's governance arrangements were provided by the Offender Management Board (OMB), a strategic partnership group focused on both children and adults involved in the criminal justice system. In March 2023 a consultation event resulted in an agreement that the Cwm Taf YOS would be rebranded as a YJS, and a dedicated YJS management board was re-established.

Merthyr Tydfil has a population of 58,800 and RCT has a larger population, of 237,700. Merthyr and RCT are, respectively, the eighth and ninth most densely populated local authorities in Wales. The 2021 Census details that 12 per cent of the population of RCT and nine per cent of Merthyr Tydfil are Welsh speakers. Cwm Taf YJS has several Welsh-speaking practitioners, and children can access services in their language of choice. Inspectors found that children had equitable access to services across both local authorities.

RCT local authority hosts the YJS and there are strategic and operational links at all levels with Merthyr Tydfil local authority. Cwm Taf YJS sits within the Children's Service's department of RCT. It is led by the head of service, who reports to the Director of Children's Services. It has a north team, covering Merthyr Tydfil, and a south team, covering RCT. In practice, we found that the teams work as one, with the four team managers and practitioners collectively providing preventative, out-of-court, statutory, and resettlement services to children. In line with the Wales Youth Justice Blueprint, Cwm Taf YJS provides a strong preventative offer to children at risk of entering the justice system.

At the time of our inspection, the YJS provided data detailing that 93 per cent of their children are not accessing mainstream schools, are in alternative education, or are on part-time timetables. The absence of an exploitation framework, and agreed screening tool, compounds the concern that school absences are not routinely viewed with consideration of the risks linked to extra-familial harm.

Since January 2022, the YJS's remand and custody numbers have been increasing. Information provided by the YJS outlines that between February 2023 and February 2024, eight children were remanded to custody and one to the care of the local authority. Eight children were sentenced to custody, with six of these children sentenced to eight months or less. Increasing remand and custody numbers are attributed to a specific group of children, with several of this cohort subject to criminal behaviour orders. The YJS management board acknowledges that partnership analysis and learning need to be formalised, to ensure that there is an agreed strategic partnership approach to dealing with future incidents.

At the point of the announcement of the inspection, the YJS's reoffending rate was 41.9 per cent, compared with the national average of 32.2 per cent. First-time entrants (FTE) had increased to 141 per 100,000 of the 10–17-year-olds in the population. The YJS has undertaken a deep-dive analysis of FTE's, resulting in the development of the universal, targeted prevention, and diversion offer to children.

Domain one: Organisational delivery

To inspect organisational delivery, we reviewed written evidence submitted in advance by the YJS and conducted 14 meetings, including with staff, volunteers, managers, board members, and partnership staff and their managers.

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.

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- Between 2017 and 2023 the governance arrangements for Cwm Taf YJS were provided by the joint youth and adult Offender Management Board (OMB). Following a consultation event in March 2023, the youth justice management board was established, and the service changed to a YJS.
- Many of the representatives from the OMB continue to attend the youth-specific management board, ensuring continuity. The board has recently reviewed its terms of reference and is seeking to expand membership to reflect the increasing number of children supported by the service on a preventative basis.
- Board members are eager to improve the YJS governance arrangements. They present as reflective and recognise opportunities to reinvigorate the board and embed child-first principles.
- The board understands the YJS's vision, strategy, and key priorities.
- Co-chairing arrangements ensure that Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf local authorities are represented. There is a commitment from the co-chairs to attend all meetings while alternating the role of the chair. The chair of the board has addressed and escalated the lack of consistent attendance by statutory and non-statutory partners.
- The YJS head of service is proactive in providing information and any matters arising to the board. YJS practitioners and managers attend the board to present reports and case studies highlighting the work undertaken with children.
- The YJS leadership team and board representatives are well connected to other local and regional partnership boards.
- The board has successfully escalated concerns regarding gaps in the statutory operational partnership arrangements. The YJS currently benefits from secondment arrangements with the police, health, and the probation service. Health and police are reviewing their resources with a view to providing additional support to the YJS.
- There is a structured and detailed induction for new board members.
- The board has benefited from a presentation provided by another local authority, detailing its journey to becoming a trauma-informed board. Youth Justice Board (YJB) Cymru has also undertaken a development session to support the board in its development.

Areas for improvement:

- The YJS leadership team has been steering the management board. The YJS management board must take responsibility for setting, developing, and reviewing the vision and strategy for the YJS.
- Strategic partnership arrangements and the management board are not driving the urgent improvements required to keep children safe from exploitation. The absence of an exploitation and extra-familial harm framework is contributing a lack of shared understanding regarding strategic and operational roles and responsibilities in keeping all children safe from harm.
- The links between exploitation and absences from education need to be fully understood by the partnership, with a particular emphasis on the number of YJS children not in mainstream education or full-time alternative provisions. Consistent board attendance from both local authority education representatives is required.
- The board's oversight and understanding of children on remand and in custody need to improve. Despite significant increases in the numbers of children remanded and sentenced to short-term periods in custody, there has been an absence of formal partnership reviewing and learning to develop provision for children to remain safely in the community.
- A review of the partnership approach to issuing criminal behaviour orders and the impact on remands and custody rates is required. The board needs to ensure that it takes collective responsibility for these children.
- The profile of YJS children and overrepresented cohorts is not widely understood. The YJS has developed a strategy to address disproportionality, but this would benefit from a strategic steer, to ensure a collective understanding of the protected characteristics and diversity needs of all children.
- Performance data is presented to the board. However, it is not sufficiently analysed or challenged. Board members are not routinely providing data from their own services to promote a holistic analysis of themes and trends across the partnership.
- Development of more robust oversight measures is required to satisfy the board that the quality of work undertaken by the YJS is effective. The board has an overreliance on the YJS to assure it that delivery is sufficient. This has led to a disconnect between strategic direction and operational delivery. Oversight should include taking a more proactive role in monitoring the quality of risk and safety management practice to ensure consistency across the service.
- Not all YJS staff are fully aware of the work undertaken by the management board. Connectivity between all board members and the YJS team requires development.
- Inspectors found high numbers of children and parents or carers willing to engage and share their experiences of working with Cwm Taf YJS. The board is missing opportunities to engage directly with children as a means of informing the vision, strategy, and key priorities.
- The board needs to develop a risk register to ensure that it identifies, monitors, and mitigates against potential risks.

1.2. Staff



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

Good

Strengths:

- Staff are enthusiastic and motivated to achieve positive outcomes for children. They feel supported by the YJS leadership team and there is a strong sense of peer support.
- The leadership team is experienced, committed, and clear about roles and areas of responsibility.
- Managers and practitioners are knowledgeable and demonstrate confidence in supporting other agencies to understand behaviours through a trauma-informed lens.
- Staff and managers have embedded child-centred approaches across all aspects of their service. Practitioners know their children well and are committed to engaging parents or carers to ensure that children's needs are supported.
- Workloads are manageable and staff can discuss any concerns regarding the volume or complexity of their caseloads with managers. They are confident that this results in adjustments and additional support. Workloads are actively managed across the YJS teams, with opportunities for co-working and accessing expertise from YJS champions.
- There are weekly management meetings, monthly team meetings, and quarterly team development days, to ensure effective communication and dissemination of information.
- Supervision is frequent and effective in balancing service needs with practitioner wellbeing. Annual appraisals inform individual development plans and the overarching YJS training needs assessment. The diversity needs of staff are supported well.
- Education psychology services facilitative reflective spaces to support YJS practitioners with their work. Clinical supervision is available to practitioners supporting children on Enhanced Case Management (ECM).
- There is a comprehensive mandatory and specialist training offer to staff and volunteers. Several practitioners have completed the Assessment, Intervention & Moving-on 3 (AIM3) harmful sexual behaviours assessment training. The YJS disseminates expertise within the team, with many practitioners undertaking 'champion' roles and supporting others to develop their knowledge and practice.
- Continuous learning is encouraged, with opportunities to undertake secondments, the social work degree, the effective practice certificate, and the child-first award.
- Processes for the recruitment of volunteers are robust and include interviews with the YJS volunteer coordinator, the team manager, and a child. Induction arrangements are comprehensive and include shadowing opportunities and additional mandatory and specialist training.
- Volunteers feel valued and part of the service. They are routinely invited to team meetings and staff development days. Volunteers feel able to provide honest feedback to the service, to influence change.

- Staff and volunteers feel safe to undertake their work. Lone working processes are understood, and managers provide oversight when work is delivered during evenings and weekends.
- Managers recognise and praise good practice in supervision and team meetings. Team members have received awards for their dedication to working with children.
- YJS wellbeing champions promote wellbeing workshops, coordinate social events, and ensure that staff achievements are recognised.

Areas for improvement:

- There is a discrepancy between the quality of practice in post-court work and out-of-court disposal work. Staff and managers should work together to promote a consistency of practice across the whole service. Oversight and quality assurance processes for out-of-court disposals must ensure that all factors related to keeping the child and others safe are consistently identified and analysed.
- The impact of training and development opportunities is not creating a consistent and shared understanding of factors linked to safeguarding, contextual safeguarding, and risks of serious harm to others.
- There are increasing demands for preventative services, and there is a 10 per cent vacancy rate within the team. Staff and managers' areas of responsibility require ongoing monitoring to ensure that workloads remain manageable.

1.3. Partnerships and services



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

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- Operationally, the range of YJS statutory partnerships works cohesively to provide effective services to children. The line managers of partnership staff have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and the complexities of the cohort.
- Victim work is a consistent strength and we found that all victims were offered support. The victim health and safety assessments inform the YJS risk and safety management processes, and there is appropriate information sharing with the police to mitigate against repeat victimisation. Involvement is victim-led and personalised to their needs and wishes.
- The YJS has two full-time seconded police officers. The police officers and their sergeant demonstrate a solid understanding of child-centred and trauma-informed practice. Strong operational links with the police have resulted in the development of outcomes 21 and 22.
- YJS police officers undertake educational sessions with children, deliver preventative workshops and assemblies in schools, and have developed positive relationships with care providers to promote restorative approaches to reducing the criminalisation of care-experienced children.
- YJS education workers demonstrate an understanding of the impact of school absences and exclusions on vulnerability and extra-familial harm. They support schools in undertaking risk and behaviour plans, and they facilitate education workshops for children who are not in school. They also link into the various education panels across RCT and Merthyr Tydfil, and have delivered trauma-informed training within the partnership. Careers Wales supports the YJS with post-16 provisions for children who are not in education, training, and employment.
- There is a strong holistic health offer, consisting of a nurse, two speech and language therapists, three substance misuse practitioners, and input from the forensic adolescent consultation service (FACS).
- Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) are a recent addition to the team. The YJS and partners acknowledge that the capacity of health provision is struggling to meet demand and there is a commitment to developing the healthcare offer.
- The seconded probation officer supports transitions from child to adult services. The Cwm Taf YJS youth to adult guide provides a visual and staged approach to supporting children and young people.
- The service has a good range of reparation projects that respond to the needs of children and their communities. The reparation offer is accredited, with opportunities for children to achieve ASDAN qualifications.
- Children engaging in the Right Hook project are supported to use boxing and martial arts to develop their social and personal skills. Sessions are held within local

communities and children can become mentors. The project won the Criminal Justice Innovation Award 2023.

- The YJS works with partner agencies to deliver targeted outreach work to children within their communities.
- Volunteers are trained and supported to offer mentoring services to children. This includes supporting them with practical and diversionary activities.
- Relationships between the YJS and youth court are strong. The court officer is held in high regard by the court and partner agencies.

Areas for improvement:

- The exploitation steering group is in the process of finalising a regional exploitation strategy across the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region. This requires urgent development as the absence of an exploitation framework, including a standardised screening tool and shared understanding of the National Referral Mechanism process, is impacting the partnerships' ability to safeguard children at risk of extra-familial harm effectively. The interface protocol between Cwm Taf YJS and Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil Children's Services is not widely understood.
- The organisational data identifies that 93 per cent of the YJS cohort are not in mainstream education, are educated at alternative provisions, or are subject to part-time timetables. There is an absence of a deep-dive analysis to determine how many children are in education that meets their needs.
- Various forums discuss the educational needs of children. However, there is a lack of focus on the specific needs of YJS children. The strategic approach is fragmented and lacks urgency in ensuring that these needs are appropriately supported. The disconnect between operational and strategic arrangements are impacting negatively on services delivered to children.
- The partnership needs to improve the way it collates and analyses data, to inform a strategic approach to developing the most effective interventions and services for children. This includes developing an understanding of disproportionality and overrepresentation among the YJS cohort.
- Processes for determining the suitability of criminal behaviour orders need to be applied consistently across both local authorities and in accordance with child first principles.
- Staff are working in a trauma-informed way but are often doing so in isolation. Developing an understanding of trauma-informed practices across key partnerships would assist in promoting a shared understanding of a child's behaviour.

1.4. Information and facilities



Timely and relevant information is available and appropriate facilities are in place to support a high-quality, personalised and responsive approach for all children.

Good

Strengths:

- Staff are flexible in how and when they see children, ensuring that their individual needs are considered. Where the plan requires a child to attend an alternative venue, because of the large geographical area and limited access to public transport, the YJS will provide transport.
- Referral order panels are held in person, with opportunities for online or hybrid engagement if this meets the needs of children, families, and volunteers.
- Staff and volunteers feel safe undertaking their work.
- Policies are comprehensive, accessible, and frequently reviewed. The YJS leadership team devise a code of practice for policies which includes seven-minute bulletins.
- Information sharing protocols and service level agreements support the effective flow of information.
- YJS practitioners have access to children's social care systems, and partners have access to their respective systems, ensuring effective information sharing.
- The YJS leadership team comprises members of child practice review panels and learning has assisted service delivery and transitions to adult services.
- Evaluation has impacted service delivery positively. The analysis of First-Time Entrants resulted in an increased focus on restorative approaches, diversion, and the allocation of a dedicated practitioner in court. Evaluation of YJS victim work against the victim code identified opportunities to strengthen the victim offer further.

Areas for improvement:

- Quality assurance of out-of-court assessing and planning activities needs greater consistency, to ensure the safety of the child and the safety of others.
- While systems do support the production of necessary information, the YJS needs to develop its analysis and interrogation of the data, to ensure that it is confident in its reliability. There are gaps with data analysis, which means that the YJS does not have an accurate picture of the profile of all YJS children.
- Reviewing of policies should incorporate the range of diversity needs and protected characteristics.
- YJS policies involving partner agencies would benefit from co-creation and wider dissemination across the partnerships, to ensure a shared understanding of expected roles and responsibilities.
- Pockets of evaluation have been successful in shaping service delivery. However, this needs to become an embedded part of practice, to ensure that the service can be confident that its work is effective in promoting desistance and keeping everyone safe.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

The YJS has a strong commitment to building meaningful relationships with children and their parents or carers. Practitioners and YJS specialists take time to get to know children, which promotes positive participation. This is reflected in the high number of children willing to engage and share their views with inspectors.

The YJS is developing a dedicated role focusing on individualised approaches to collating feedback from those who access support from the YJS. Previously, feedback from children and their parents or carers was captured using questionnaires.

The YJS contacted, on our behalf, children 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 59 children who consented, and 32 children replied. We also interviewed 10 children, three parents, and a carer. All children and parents or carers felt that YJS practitioners had the rights skills, with a number commenting that they felt listened to and did not feel judged by professionals.

Children told us that:

“Yes, I was basically lost like I knew what I wanted outta life but not how to go about it...I got a long history of bad experiences with any kinda representative of the system and the people at that YJS and the social services were the first people in that kinda position to treat me like a human being, not a statistic not a criminal, not a bad person, but a human being and for me that’s the mutual respect I needed to have to put me in a state of mind where I could actually interact with what they have to offer, which in my experience is where these kinda services fall short.”

“They think about what things might be like for me. They take their time to listen and if I’m not feeling up to things they will help me get out of the house and find some space where they will talk to me. They have the right skills to work with young people.”

The positive impact of the Right Hook boxing and martial arts activity was detailed by children, with reflections that it helped change thinking and behaviour patterns. Numerous children and parents or carers shared that the YJS had been pivotal in removing barriers to accessing education, CAMHS, speech and language therapy, and substance misuse services. One said:

“So they have helped me with school and have helped me with getting me help for drugs. They have arranged a drug worker to come and see me. They have helped me in areas of my life that I needed help with. I used to wake up in the mornings really angry and they have talked to me about what I can do to help with that and now I’m much better and controlling myself.”

The YJS management board hears case studies detailing the experiences of children supported by the YJS. The high levels of engagement with inspectors suggests that there is a tangible opportunity to involve children and their parents or carers in the development of the YJS vision and strategy, and in future service delivery.

Diversity

- Cwm Taf YJS policies and practices enshrine the principles of the Wales Youth Justice Blueprint. The service offers comprehensive preventative support, with a focus on child-first approaches.
- In line with the Blueprint, trauma-informed practices are embedded. The YJS routinely refers into FACS, to access ECM for children who have experienced extensive trauma. ECM is underpinned by the trauma recovery model and requires a multi-agency approach to formulating an understanding of a child's lived experiences. Psychology input and assessments support the YJS and partner agencies in determining how trauma has impacted the child's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. Interactions and interventions are tailored to meet individual developmental needs. Inspectors found impressive examples of the YJS using relationship-based approaches to engage children and their parents or carers.
- The YJS has identified overrepresentation of children looked after and has been responsive in presenting information to the corporate parenting board. It is supporting care providers with training and input to encourage restorative approaches and a reduction in the unnecessary criminalisation of care experienced children.
- Children not in mainstream education and on part-time timetables are vastly overrepresented in the YJS cohort and urgent attention is required to ensure that they are supported to have their educational needs met.
- Children from black, Asian, and minority ethnic groups working with the service were marginally overrepresented. Consequently, the YJS completed a deep-dive analysis to ascertain learning, culminating in the anti-racist strategy and action plan.
- The YJS management board and strategic partnerships' approach to analysing data requires development, with a particular focus on understanding overrepresented groups for all nine protected characteristics. Connectivity between operational activity and the strategic approach requires cohesion, to ensure that disproportionality is understood across all aspects of the service and partnership.
- Development of the child-first strategy has resulted in the creation of groups dedicated to areas of specialism, including disproportionality and overrepresentation. The YJS acknowledges that the initiative is in its infancy and that strategic steer is required to implement the action plans effectively.
- The YJS has several Welsh-speaking practitioners, and all children have access to services in either Welsh or English.
- Inspectors found impressive individual examples of practitioners responding to the diversity needs of children. Practitioners had recognised children's diverse needs in 90 per cent of the post-court cases and 75 per cent of out-of-court disposals.
- Speech and language therapy input is impactful, with testimonials from children, parents or carers, YJS practitioners, and partner agencies outlining the significant improvement that assessments have made to their engagement with children with speech, language, and communication difficulties.
- The YJS needs to ensure that there is a consistent structured offer for girls, in terms of specific resources, provisions, and approaches.
- Policies cover diversity and disproportionality but would benefit from being specific to the demographics of Cwm Taf YJS.

- Out of the 28 staff and seven volunteers who identified a diversity need in the HM Inspectorate of Probation survey, all reported that their diversity needs had been responded to 'very well' or 'quite well'.

Domain two: Court disposals

We took a detailed look at nine community sentences and one custodial sentence managed by the YJS.

2.1. Assessment



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

Good

Our rating² for assessment is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	90%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	70%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	80%

Inspectors identified a high degree of complex need and vulnerabilities among the children, and this was understood by YJS practitioners. Three of the 10 children were looked after at some point during their sentence and knife crime was a feature in six out of the 10 cases inspected.

Practitioners used a range of information from partner agencies to understand and analyse children's behaviour, attitudes, and motivation for offending. This was balanced with promoting strengths and protective factors. The meaningful engagement of parents or carers was impressive, and practitioners took time to build relationships with the child, their families, and wider networks.

Specialist assessments and reports were used to enhance the YJS's understanding of diversity, including a child's attachment style; speech, language, and communication needs; and additional learning needs (ALN). YJS practitioners were confident in facilitating conversations around a child's identity, lived experiences, gender, ethnicity, and heritage.

Where assessing activity to keep the child safe was done well practitioners had analysed information held by other agencies, and this was used to balance the impact of early childhood trauma with current concerns to the child's physical, psychological, and emotional safety.

Assessing activity to keep others safe was enhanced by Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). Inspectors found several examples where the risk levels had been justified well with reference to the impact, likelihood, and imminence of harm. Consistently applying this approach to all cases would enhance the quality of assessing activity.

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 in the data annex.](#)

2.2. Planning



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

Outstanding

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

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	100%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	100%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	80%

Planning for the child's desistance needs, their safety and wellbeing, and the safety of others was impressive. Trauma-informed approaches were an embedded part of practice, and this was reflected in the approach to planning activities.

Planning focused on the child's diversity needs in all cases and there was a strong focus on considering the child's wider familial and social context. The strengths-based approaches to assessing were carried forward into planning, with children encouraged to identify positive goals and aspirations to support future desistance.

Appropriate interventions and referrals were identified to reduce risks and concerns. For example, where children were experiencing drugs and/or alcohol difficulties, substance misuse referrals and harm reduction plans were developed. Planning considered children's speech, language, and communication needs, ALN, and attachment styles. We found sensitive planning around the introduction of change into a child's life, including a gradual inclusion of new professionals and a tailored approach to transitions to adult services.

Inspectors found alignment between the plans of the YJS and of other agencies, with examples of effective planning with police, health, education, and children's services. Multi-agency ECM formulation meetings, MAPPA, and Prevent meetings enhanced planning activities and ensured a balanced approach to keeping everyone safe.

Contingency planning was individualised and specific to a child's circumstances. Factors linked to potential increases and decreases in concerns were identified and used to inform a clear plan of action which detailed specific tasks and timescales. We found examples of planning and contingency planning which enabled children to take part in diversionary activities and educational trips.

Planning to keep others safe focussed on the wishes, needs and safety of the victim. We found examples of holistic planning between the victim worker, YJS and police resulting in tailored support for the victim.

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

2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Outstanding

Our rating⁴ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

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

Post-court implementation and delivery of services was a strength. Practitioners understood children's diversity and individual needs, and inspectors found impressive examples of cultural humility, demonstrating sensitivity towards heritage, identity, and religious events. Interventions and toolkits had been adapted to meet a range of neurodiverse needs. Practitioners considered routine in the days and times of appointments. Venues, room layouts, and the presence of others were all factored into the delivery of sessions, and this encouraged the provision of safe spaces and places for children.

Timely and tailored interventions were delivered by health practitioners, education workers, and seconded police officers. Transitions to adult probation services were responsive to the child's needs. Substance misuse support was a strength. Specialist police officers provided support with areas such as hate crime and extremist ideology. We found that arrangements between practitioners and specialists were cohesive in supporting children and keeping everyone safe.

Reparation activity was meaningful, with consideration for the child's strengths and areas of interest. Children were able to develop skills and gain ASDAN qualifications. We found several examples of children engaged positively in the boxing and martial art project delivered by the YJS to promote social and personal development.

Effective multi-agency working was present in all relevant cases, with formal meetings and ongoing communication by email and telephone ensuring that professionals were responsive to the changes impacting the child's safety and the safety of others.

Inspectors found that considerable work was being undertaken looking at victim experiences and the impact of the child's behaviour. Victim safety processes informed the implementation of external controls in the majority of cases. Where this worked well, victim safety assessments had been shared with neighbourhood policing teams resulting in additional support and monitoring to safeguard victims.

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

2.4. Reviewing



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

Good

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

	% 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	100%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently keeping the child safe?	80%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently keeping other people safe?	70%

Reviewing of the child's desistance was a consistent strength, with children and parents or carers meaningfully involved in reviewing activities. Referral order panels reinforced the positive steps and achievements made by the child. Inspectors found appropriate use of early revocation processes, with a child returned to court to have their referral order revoked on the grounds of good progress. Exit strategies were considered at a timely stage, with children supported to attend universal and community diversionary activities. Children and their parents or carers were offered opportunities to continue accessing YJS support on a voluntary basis.

Where reviewing to keep the child safe worked well, all relevant agencies had been involved in the reviewing process. Multi-agency panel meetings, ECM formulation meetings, and children's social care statutory forums provided spaces to discuss and manage concerns or escalations in the risk to the child's safety and wellbeing. We also found an example of the transition from youth to adult services supporting the reviewing of a National Referral Mechanism referral, ensuring that a child's vulnerabilities were considered as they reached the age of 18 years.

Inspectors found that multi-agency participation resulted in a clearer understanding of each agency's roles and responsibilities, and this contributed towards responsive and timely adjustments to the ongoing plans to keep the child safe.

Practice could be strengthened by ensuring that emerging factors, linked to potential risks to others, are incorporated into formal reviewing processes. Where we saw this work well, emerging risk factors had been sufficiently analysed to inform and justify changes in risk classifications.

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

Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

We inspected 16 cases managed by the YJS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of one youth conditional caution, two youth cautions, 11 community resolutions, and two other disposals. We interviewed the case managers in 12 cases.

3.1. Assessment



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

Inadequate

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

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	63%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	31%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	38%

Although the YJS had created an early intervention assessment and accompanying guidance, aimed at ensuring quality out-of-court assessment activity, it was evident in our inspection sample that practice required significant development. Assessment sufficiently analysed offending behaviours in only half of the cases inspected and consisted of too much description and too little analysis.

Operational partnerships were not used effectively to collate information held by partner agencies. Inspectors found gaps in information gathering and the utilising of information which resulted in a superficial understanding of the factors contributing to the child's offending and the risks posed to the child and to others. A lack of professional curiosity resulted in missed opportunities to understand the context of behaviours. For example, a child was excluded from school but the circumstances and reasons for the exclusion were not followed up; the reasons behind a child being in care were not explored; and contact was not made with CAMHS to understand the triggers for self-harming behaviours.

Exploitation concerns were not always identified or actioned. The absence of an exploitation screening tool may have contributed to the inconsistent response to recognising and analysing signs of extra-familial harm.

Inspectors found that assessment activity to keep others safe tended to focus on a singular incident, rather than considering holistic behaviours. Inconsistent understandings of the difference between harm and serious harm contributed to risks not being quantified or contextualised.

Positively, the needs and wishes of victims were considered in all relevant cases and practitioners had a strong focus on the child's strengths and protective factors to promote desistance.

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 in the data annexe.](#)

3.2. Planning



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

Inadequate

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

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus on supporting the child's desistance?	69%
Does planning focus on keeping the child safe?	44%
Does planning focus on keeping other people safe?	44%

Insufficiency in assessing continued through into planning. Too few cases focused on keeping children and other people safe. The bureau decision-making panel did not include representatives from children's services or the YJS practitioner who had completed the assessment and plan. The latter were not part of the discussions informing the out-of-court disposal outcome, and their inclusion might have provided an opportunity to improve and focus planning activities on keeping the child and others safe.

Planning to promote a child's desistance was enhanced by a focus on children's strengths and protective factors. Inspectors found that planning gave sufficient attention to the needs and wishes of victims in the vast majority of cases, and we found examples of seconded police officers facilitating restorative sessions with children.

Planning activity to keep the child and others safe was inconsistent. Where this was done well, YJS practitioners were involved in joint planning with schools and with social workers, with regular liaison and integrated planning. We found missed opportunities to work collaboratively with other agencies, and several examples that would have benefited from referrals to the YJS multi-agency panels. This included children with a multitude of needs including missing from home episodes, concerning online use, association with pro-criminal adults and self-harming behaviours.

The absence of contingency planning limited the ability of practitioners and partner agencies to be responsive to changing circumstances. Contingency planning to address escalating concerns about the safety of a child, and that of other people, could have been improved by ensuring that plans were not generic but a response to individual children's situations. Actions needed to be specific, timebound, and shared with the range of professionals supporting the child.

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

3.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Good

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

	% 'Yes'
Does service delivery effectively support the child's desistance?	75%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?	69%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	81%

Practitioners focused on building positive relationships with the child and their parent or carer. Inspectors found tenacious efforts by YJS practitioners to address barriers to children attending and engaging with education. Where this worked well, we saw examples of YJS practitioners and the education workers following up absences from school, supporting safety plans, and escalating individual matters of concern.

Victim work, restorative interventions, and reparation provided children with opportunities to start repairing harm. This worked particularly well when these interventions were tailored to meet the child's learning styles and individual needs. We found a sensitivity in the methods with which interventions had been delivered to children displaying speech, language, and communication needs.

The safety of children and the safety of others was enhanced by multi-agency working. We found examples of effective communication and joint working between the YJS, children's social workers, education, healthcare staff, and the police, and when this happened, it resulted in positive actions to support the child and to keep everyone safe. However, this was inconsistent, and inspectors found examples where emerging indicators of exploitation had not been identified and explored. In other cases, referrals into children's social care had not met the threshold for involvement and this was not challenged or escalated to the YJS leadership team. Developing a partnership understanding of exploitation and extra-familial harm would support a consistent approach to keeping children safe.

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

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 guidance documents provided a detailed framework to support and guide out-of-court disposal practice.
- Bureau decision-making panels included a YJS manager, seconded police officers, a police sergeant, a victim worker, and a community representative. Following an evaluation of children’s needs, panel representation was extended to include an education representative and the ALN champion. The YJS had accessed support from an educational psychologist to consider children’s ability and capacity to engage.
- The offer to victims was holistic. All victims were contacted to ascertain their views on the out-of-court disposal process and offered opportunities to engage in the victim health and safety assessment. Victim wishes and their safety were considered throughout all out-of-court processes.
- The YJS had a strong preventative offer to children and families, promoting early engagement and support to avoid escalation to the justice system. Decisions around the prevention offer were made through a specific prevention panel, consisting of YJS staff, and informed by police, education, and health.
- Access to services was equitable. Children who were subject to out-of-court disposals had access to the same interventions and services as those subject to post-court orders. Interventions were delivered using a trauma-informed and strengths-based approach. Children were supported to access diversionary activities and exit planning included opportunities to work with the YJS on a voluntary basis.
- The development of diversionary pathways to avoid the unnecessary criminalisation of children was positive. The YJS had analysed the First-Time Entrant cohort and developed processes to mitigate against unnecessary court appearances. This included the introduction of the Drive to Change programme for motoring offences, use of restorative approaches, and voluntary educational support for children not meeting the threshold for the bureau panel.
- The YJS had a principal social worker based in the court, who contacted children and their parents or carers, liaised with the court, and screened court listings for matters that were eligible for out-of-court disposal assessments.
- The data provided to the regional multi-agency scrutiny panel was comprehensive, promoting analysis and evaluation of the use of out-of-court disposals.

Areas for improvement:

- The bureau decision-making panel did not include key representation from children’s services. This was acknowledged and there was a commitment to allocating resource.
- There was a disconnect between out-of-court policy and the quality of some aspects of casework. The early intervention assessment guidance was comprehensive and

detailed how to analyse desistance, the safety of the child, and the safety of others sufficiently. In practice, inspectors found shortfalls in out-of-court practices and insufficiencies in assessing and planning to keep the child and others safe.

- The child's views were included in the written YJS assessment. However, the YJS case manager did not attend the bureau panel and decisions on out-of-court disposals were made in the absence of anyone who had met the child. YJS case managers had a limited understanding of the rationale for the out-of-court outcome.
- The YJS had identified increasing numbers of females within the out-of-court disposal arena, and the development of specific provision was required.
- Children and their parents or carers were not directly involved in the evaluation of the out-of-court disposal policy.

4.1. Resettlement

4.1. Resettlement policy and provision



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

Good

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

Strengths:

- Resettlement policy and practice were underpinned by child-first and trauma-informed approaches. The importance of identity was understood and the YJS promoted individualised plans and interventions that were responsive to children's needs.
- Pathways for suitable accommodation; healthcare provision; and education, training, and employment all featured well in the policy and supported the achievement of positive outcomes.
- Timely YJS-led multi-agency panels planned for a child's release from custody. In our inspection of the delivery of resettlement work, we saw effective processes to ensure the safety of the child, victims, and wider public.
- There was a strong in-reach offer to children in custody. Inspectors found that children received effective resettlement services, with sufficient planning and provision for accommodation; education, training, and employment; and healthcare. Constructive activities and additional support were encouraged to engage children and to occupy their time.
- There were established links with the local custodial establishment. This promoted effective communication and the sharing of information to support the child and keep everyone safe. Representatives from the custodial establishment attended the YJS multi-agency panels and MAPPA meetings. YJS staff attended reviews in the custodial estate.
- Inspectors found that the needs of victims were considered in all cases. Victim views and their sense of safety informed sentence planning and licence conditions.
- YJS practitioners and specialists had high levels of contact with children in custody, to maintain and develop their working relationships. Children's parents or carers were meaningfully involved throughout the sentence, to support a positive identity shift.
- Inspectors found tenacious efforts to engage children in education and training, with the use of release on temporary licence and technology supporting bespoke education packages. Several children were supported to obtain qualifications while in custody.
- Transitions from youth to adult services were enhanced by joint working arrangements between the seconded probation officer and integrated offender management police officer.

- The diversity needs of children in custody were understood and supported. The resettlement policy recognised that each child's journey is unique, and focused on diversity considerations including gender, age, ethnicity, ALN, child looked after (CLA) status, identity, and the impact of trauma and adverse childhood experiences. The YJS detailed that resettlement planning for those who had experienced trauma would be dovetailed with its ECM formulation process.
- Staff working with children in custody had received appropriate training and felt confident in undertaking resettlement work.

Areas for improvement:

- The YJS management board needed to undertake immediate work to gain a greater understanding of the cohort of children in custody.
- Remand and resettlement policies would have benefited from joint reviewing with children's services, the police, and the community safety partnership, to ensure that everyone had a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities.
- The views of children and their parents or carers were not formally captured to inform the evaluation and review of resettlement policy and provision.

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.](#)